



# Femme Fatale

An Examination of the Role of Women  
in Combat and the Policy Implications  
for Future American Military Operations

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KRISTAL L. M. ALFONSO, Lt Col, USAF  
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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction**

*According to Tolstoy, war and women are things that don't go together—they exist apart. But when I witnessed all the atrocities of 1941, the death of my friends and relatives, peaceful civilians, I wanted to liberate my people from the enemy. I want you to underline in red that it was the cherished dream of the girls to liberate the land, but none of us wanted to fight—to kill.*

—Capt Mariya Dolina  
125th Guards Bomber Regiment  
Hero of the Soviet Union

Women have always participated in armed conflict, most often as active supporters of the armies they have followed. Some women, usually the wives of soldiers, served as nurses, laundresses, cooks, and seamstresses. Other women chose active participation in battle, including the famed Molly Pitcher. Mary Hays McCauly earned this moniker during the Battle of Monmouth in 1778 when she provided pitchers of water and medical care to members of the Continental Army fighting the British. After shrapnel struck her husband, McCauly took up his position as a cannoneer so that the artillery crew could continue to fight. Gen George Washington rewarded her bravery by making her a noncommissioned officer.\* The story of Molly Pitcher symbolizes the realities of women and war. War has always affected women to some capacity despite civilized society's best attempts to protect the gentler sex from war's brutality. Yet, despite Molly Pitcher's successes on the battlefield, which included picking up an injured soldier to save him from charging British soldiers, American culture has traditionally deprecated female participation in war. In most cultures, even today, a woman engaged in combat operations represented an anathema, such as the reactions to Jeanne d'Arc by political and religious leaders.

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\*Public Affairs Office, Fort Sill, OK, "The Story of Molly Pitcher," <http://sill-www.army.mil/pao/pamolloy.htm>.

History, therefore, has either completely dismissed female contributions and participation in armed conflicts or relegated their participation to scandalous supporting roles, such as prostitutes or pillow-friendly spies. The reality is women have made significant contributions in military conflicts, and their role continues to expand in the modern era.

This paper reviews four case studies that demonstrate the variety of ways women have participated in modern armed conflict and explores whether current US laws and policies excluding women from combat remain valid or need to be amended. Each case study examines three principal facets of female participation in combat: context, motivations and inspirations, and the actual contributions made by these women in combat operations. Two case studies, one on World War II Soviet pilots and the other on modern Americans, follow the more traditional explanation of armed conflict and focus on women integrated into military organizations involved in wars. The other two case studies, including one on female resistance fighters in World War II Europe and another on female terrorists and insurgents, represent the asymmetric aspects female participation often provides during conflicts.

The first case study examines the women involved in resistance operations throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Contextually, many of the women presented in this case study had experienced or had close family to live through World War I. That experience evoked strong emotional motivations for many of the women profiled and often resulted in intense hatred of their enemies, the German Nazis. Due to the loss of family members and friends and with the emotions provoked by the occupation, many women believed that they had no other choice but to resist. In their minds resistance represented defense of their families, friends, culture, and nations. While most of these women began their resistance activities as lookouts and messengers, many went on to conduct insurgent paramilitary operations against the Nazi occupying forces.

Additionally, a number of female resistance fighters figured in the increasing politization of women in pre-World War II Europe. Female members of the Communist Party, for example, believed in the equality of the workers, regardless of gender. Since most resistance movements represented a conglomerate

tion of political viewpoints, female communists were able to engage in resistance activities due to their association with their political party. Similarly, female Zionists also found it easier to engage in nontraditional roles due to the Nazi persecution of European Jewry. The overriding cultural expectations of European women during the 1930s and 1940s remained entrenched in the notion that a woman's traditional role was that of wife, mother, and family nurturer. The realities of the Nazi occupation led to a reevaluation of how women could contribute to their societies and actually opened doors previously closed to them. While these women still struggled to make their contributions to the resistance, they often found greater support among men with similar political views.

The second case focuses on the three female flying units created by Joseph Stalin shortly after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. Similar to the female communists in resistance movements elsewhere in Europe, the story of female Soviet pilots demonstrates the complexity surrounding a political ideology that promotes equality among the genders yet continues to enforce patriarchal expectations of the role and behavior of women. Women like Marina Raskova often had to depend on relationships with male party or military leaders to gain entry into the Soviet military system. Further, persistence remained a key element for the realization of female combat roles. Most women profiled here had to persist in asking permission to fly or to enter the military until male authority relented.

The invasion by Germany did not make inclusion of females into the Soviet military any easier. From the start, most female combatants remained isolated from their male counterparts and had to prove their abilities continuously. Ultimately some women had the opportunity to join male regiments and flourished once they demonstrated their worth. Organizationally, however, the Soviet military remained dubious about female combatants and that attitude persists today in the Russian military. The contributions and successes of the female Soviet combatants in World War II, however, defy those attitudes. The Night Witches, as the Germans called one unit, proved that women could handle the rigors of combat, possessed the desired aggressive instinct required in combat, and were motivated in many of the same ways as their male counterparts.



The third case study examines the roles of women in more recent insurgencies, what many would call terrorist operations. For the most part, these women fulfill the role of suicide bombers used by many terrorist organizations to conduct their wars; however, the startling fact remains that all of these women come from very conservative and patriarchal societies. From Lebanon to Chechnya to Sri Lanka, the role of women in these cultures remains one of wife, mother, and daughter whose fate lies in the hands of the men in their lives.

While suicide bombing has evolved into an accepted reality of terrorist tactics, the world still reacts strongly to the notion of female suicide bombers. This case study explores the motivations behind the actions of these women and reveals that there are a number of similarities between these modern resistance fighters and those from World War II. Primarily, these women also feel that they have no other choice but to join terrorist organizations to fight the occupiers of their homelands. Most are victims of brutal attacks who have usually lost husbands or children, or been raped by occupying soldiers. For many of these women, their sacrifice provides them a final opportunity to serve their community. Ironically, their actions have also led to interesting developments in these conservative cultures where women are slowly earning praise and recognition as combatants, leading to small and subtle, yet significant, shifts in cultural norms.

The use of female combatants by America's enemies has also accelerated shifts in American military culture as well. The fourth case study examines how the US military evolved from a conscript force into the all-volunteer force that depends on female participation for mission accomplishment. As the US military grapples with the realities of insurgent warfare, female military members have quietly proven their capabilities in the air and land combat environments.

The fourth case study also serves as the heart of this research paper since it focuses on the role of American women in combat. Current policies actually limit the combat roles available to women and spur some critics to argue the combat exclusion policies do not go far enough. The fifth chapter of this paper presents this side of the debate over the role of women in combat and military service in general. This chapter presents

the leading arguments against the inclusion of women in combat beginning with the physical differences between men and women, the effects of women on unit cohesion and combat readiness, and the moral debate over sending a society's mothers and daughters to war. Chapter 5 highlights the growing divergence between conservative cultural norms and the realities of current combat operations while providing a backdrop for the sixth chapter.

This paper concludes with a proposal of how the US military and society should move forward regarding the role of women in combat. The realities remain that despite the best attempts by critics to argue that society should protect women from the violence of war, in an all-volunteer force structure women are nevertheless currently engaged in combat. Furthermore, all women, military and civilian, have always been and will remain subject to the brutalities of war. The events of 11 September 2001, prominent among a myriad of others, demonstrate that reality.

The four case studies presented in this paper provide the evidence that women have and always will participate in combat. Moreover, their successful contributions have made differences in the outcomes of wars. To deny citizens the right to fight for their country based solely on their gender remains blatant discrimination. The United States should once again assume a leadership role in the world, live up to the rhetoric of its principles, and demonstrate that women and men possess civic equality.



## Chapter 2

### **The Female Fighters of World War II**

*At that time it was clear that each Nazi I killed, each bomb I helped to explode, shortened the length of the war and saved the lives of all women and children. . . . I never asked myself if the soldier or SS man I killed had a wife or children. I never thought about it.*

—Marisa Masu, Italian resistance fighter

In both Western and Eastern cultures, expectations of the role women play in society, in peace or in war, diminish the contributions women make in the conduct of war. While a man is expected and even revered for taking up arms, defending his hearth, kin, and country, even if such action results in his own death, a woman behaving in a similar manner faces a different societal response. Women involved in armed resistance, even during an enlightened modern era, are often accused of engaging in “the ‘unwomanly’ behavior” and acting “‘like men’ in the struggle.”<sup>1</sup> Society explains the motivations of these women using familiar stereotypes. Their actions are the result of the scorn of a significant other or because they are more emotional and less rational, thereby denigrating their contributions. Political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain explains: “Female violence, it followed, was an aberration . . . [and] brooked no good. It was overpersonalized [*sic*] and vindictive: behold the ‘vengeful women of Marblehead.’”<sup>2</sup>

### **Context Mattered—Societal Expectations of Women during World War II**

Whereas, Elshtain argues, a man engaged in violence can be “moralized as a structured activity—war—and thus be depersonalized and idealized,” a cultural aspect common to every society regardless of religious, ethnic, or historical background.<sup>3</sup> Many of the anti-Nazi female fighters, despite the role they played in the defeat of the Nazis, still regarded their activities

as an aberration and did not believe that women belonged in combat. Russian women who fought in World War II, for the most part, agreed that women “do not belong in combat” and that those who took up arms against the Nazis only did so because “Russia faced certain destruction.”<sup>4</sup> The appropriate role women should have played has resulted in a skewed perception of the actual activities that women were involved in and has limited testimonials as to why and to what level women contributed to the resistance. Many of these women felt they simply had no choice but to resist. They believed their activities and actions failed to compare with the men, who were also fighting the Nazis, since society expected its men to resist.

In spite of the evidence provided by female participants that they took up arms and actively fought the Nazis, many historians, and the women themselves, often dismiss their activities as being in support rather than the active resistance it really was. According to Timothy Kirk and Anthony McElligott, in historical accounts of the resistance against the Nazis, “an iconography of women resisters as ‘saints’ emerged. Essentially, the male resistance was ‘real,’ while women’s resistance to fascism was relegated to the traditional roles of support and self-sacrifice. Armed women are either written out or deprived of their female identity, while women in nurturing or caring roles lose any claim to be equal resisters.”<sup>5</sup>

By redefining the roles women played in the resistance and their impact on operations, historians, analysts, and the fighters themselves actually perpetuate the notion that the role of a woman is that of a life giver and not an active freedom fighter who takes life when required. As Elshtain notes, “Women warriors, like their male counterparts, see their violent actions as a form of defense, preservation, and life saving.”<sup>6</sup> These culturally biased notions create a narrow view of the tactical usefulness of women in resistance and terrorist activities. Terrorists and insurgent groups continue to exploit this narrow view today.

### **Necessity or Personal Motivations—What Explains Female Resistance?**

The desire for vengeance against the Nazis and the German people for crimes committed against family, friends, and coun-

try during the reign of the Third Reich as well as during the devastation of World War I drove many women to resist the German occupiers. French resistance fighter and famous writer, Marguerite Duras, admits in her memoirs that "For a while I could bear the grudge against them, it was quite plain and clear, I wanted to massacre all of them, the whole population of Germany, wipe them off the face of the earth, make it impossible for it to happen again."<sup>7</sup> Many women and young girls, like Duras, endured separation from male relatives due to the mobilization of Europe's armies, which evoked memories of the first war and created new animosities towards the latest German invaders.

Elisabeth Sevier recalled the last time she saw her own father: "On that day, I think I felt the first twinge of hate toward Adolf Hitler and Germany. I hated the Germans for separating my family, for causing my Papa to join the army and leave the rest of us at home."<sup>8</sup> Sevier ultimately joined the resistance after witnessing an event that still haunts her. She described overhearing a commotion involving three drunken German soldiers, a Jewish mother, and her child: "I looked just in time to see a frightened young Jewish woman trying to hide her yellow star by holding her baby to her breast. The next thing I saw was almost as unbelievable as it was barbaric: one of the German soldiers drew his revolver and fired two shots at the mother and baby."<sup>9</sup> For many women in Europe, personal experiences such as these inspired them to take up arms against the Germans since they felt robbed of their normal lives and their families.

Still reeling from the wounds inflicted from four years of trench warfare during World War I, many Europeans loathed the idea of fighting another war and directed their hatred toward the perpetrator of both conflicts: Germany. Historian Evelyne Sullerot recalled when her brother had been mobilized, "Only twenty years between the two wars and we had lost an entire generation [of young men]. My brother was born in 1919, one year after the war ended. He had the name of a dead uncle. And now he was being called to fight in another world war."<sup>10</sup> The Sullerot family found themselves still grieving for the loss of life and property experienced during World War I when the Germans returned in 1940 to what many Europeans viewed as the scene of Germany's most dastardly crime. Lucie Aubrac "did

not view her first efforts in the fall of 1940 as *resistance*. It was a question of conscience" (emphasis in original).<sup>11</sup> Aubrac felt she had to prevent another tragedy by stopping the Germans before a repeat of the Great War occurred.<sup>12</sup>

Germaine Tillion, an early French resistance organizer, also felt compelled by her conscience to take action to throw off the yoke of German occupation. She fully understood the risks that she and her compatriots undertook.<sup>13</sup> Tillion's groups initially assisted French prisoners of war as well as aiding Jews escaping the country. Her group eventually coordinated intelligence collection with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and Free French intelligence agencies. Tillion's activities resulted in her arrest and internment at the notorious Ravensbrück concentration camp.<sup>14</sup>

Another French woman, Lucienne Guezennec, used the metaphor of rape to describe the occupation. Guezennec explained that her motivation to resist primarily developed out of her disgust with the invading Germans: "My reaction to the Occupation was anti-German. Not ideological or whatever—out-and-out anti-German. The invasion was like rape. To this day when I read about a rape trial, I am reminded of the Occupation. This was really a violation—violation of my country. It was impossible to remain passive."<sup>15</sup> Like many of her fellow resistance fighters, Guezennec's disdain for the German occupiers and their Vichy supporters found its basis in the previous war with the Germans. She viewed the Germans as "wild hordes, like the barbarians of old."<sup>16</sup> Guezennec eventually began sheltering refugees from the Germans including former prisoners, Jews, and Allied pilots evading German capture.<sup>17</sup>

Guezennec's memories of World War I were not isolated but, in fact, were a common experience shared by many Europeans who "remembered that German armies had destroyed their family homes or those of relatives in World War I."<sup>18</sup> Marisa Musu, an Italian resistance fighter, strongly sought to engage in armed conflict and thus joined the Italian Patriotic Action Groups (GAP for *Gruppi di Azione Patriottica*) in her belief that "armed resistance was the best and simplest solution."<sup>19</sup> The tragedies that befell her fellow citizens during 20 years of Fascist rule coupled with the actions of Nazi Germany strongly influenced Musu's decision to participate in GAP resistance ac-

tivities. As Elshtain explained, “women warriors, like their male counterparts, see their violent actions as a form of defense, preservation, life saving.”<sup>20</sup>

One such personal tragedy befalling a woman during the war is the story of Gina Borellini, a resistance fighter in Modena, Italy. Borellini initially joined the resistance “because of her husband and brother.”<sup>21</sup> At first, Borellini served as a weapons and message carrier. Eventually Fascists arrested her, along with her husband, and subjected Borellini to mock executions to elicit information on resistance activities. Although she did not reveal any information, her captors executed her husband for his actions in the resistance. Following her husband’s execution and the arrest of her brother, Borellini then joined a partisan brigade unit where she engaged in armed conflict against the Fascists, losing her leg in the process.<sup>22</sup>

While armed female members in partisan units were not as common as other forms of resistance across Europe, their partisan activities eventually extended well beyond their initial roles as messengers, evasion guides, nurses, and intelligence operatives. Women, such as Borellini, directly participated in sabotage and ambush activities. As one Polish partisan acknowledged, “Among all the resisters, their task was the most demanding, their sacrifices the greatest, and their work the least recognized. They were overloaded with work and doomed from the start.”<sup>23</sup>

The ramifications of World War I went beyond Europe’s mobilization of the male population and the subsequent loss of lives and land. Women had to take over as providers for their families due to the loss of husbands and fathers. Thus, World War I provided women with their first real opportunities for meaningful and important work outside the home. This generational development contributed to female involvement in the fight against the Nazis. Since there were simply too few men to perform normal tasks, women demonstrated their abilities to perform tasks once designated as a man’s job.

Within the newly formed British SOE, for example, the use of women in nontraditional forms became an accepted practice. Due to the nature and subversive mission of the SOE, cultural and societal norms did not apply to the women who joined. Margaret Rossiter explained the function of women in respect to SOE operations in France:



Women played important roles in the various sections of SOE. Unlike the older services, this new and unorthodox organization was not bound by traditions about suitable tasks for women. It employed women not only because of the *shortage of qualified men*, but also because of the special advantages women *could offer*. *Women were therefore trained in intelligence, radio communications, sabotage, paramilitary activities, and parachute jumping*. Many served in England as staff officers, radio operators, and code clerks, and 39 were sent as agents to France. *Twelve of these were executed in German prisons or concentration camps, and one died of meningitis in the field.*<sup>24</sup> (emphasis added)

The efforts of the SOE provided women with an opportunity to combat the Nazi military occupation. Clearly necessity played an important role in creating this and similar opportunities. Necessity alone, however, does not explain the involvement of women in the resistance. While necessity provided opportunities to participate in paramilitary operations, personal and political motivations drove women to participate in resistance activities.

Unfortunately, those opportunities diminished following the defeat of Nazi Germany. Due to the nature of societal expectations of the roles a woman should play, many of them never shared their experiences or sought postwar recognition.<sup>25</sup> For those women who died during the resistance, evidence of their participation has been lost simply because most resistance organizations owed their very survival to minimal documentation. For members of organized political groups, such as the communists and those Zionists who managed to escape the Final Solution, there is a greater wealth of written accounts of motivations and activities.

### **Political Motivations: The Role of Communism and Zionism**

In addition to religious motivations and personal experiences, some women chose to take up arms due to their political objection against fascism or Nazism, both of which enforced traditional roles for women as childbearers and homemakers. A large number of these women had a strong belief in the communist ideology. Already forced underground by conservative governments prior to the rise of the Third Reich, communism provided these women with an organization that suited their

desires for equality.<sup>26</sup> In essence, to be a communist provided them with emancipation from being the “breeders of cannon fodder” and, eventually, with equal rights, pay, and freedom.<sup>27</sup> As the Nazis conquered Europe, the communists saw an opportunity to increase their political power and membership through resistance movements.

While not as prevalent in the political spectrum, Zionism, an ideology that promoted the idea of a Jewish state, also began attracting new members, particularly women. Jews had been the historical scapegoat for European woes even before the Nazis. Zionists, therefore, understood the experience of being treated as inferiors and within the Zionist movement, women found themselves in positions of leadership and often treated as equals by their male counterparts. While political objectives inspired Zionists, other Jews chose to resist the Nazis to help free their people from oppression just as Moses had in the Exodus. They sought to protect their families, faith, and fellow Jews.

Following World War I, more women in the West began to demand a measure of equality with their male counterparts. While these early feminists fought the prescribed societal norms placed upon them by paternalistic societies, many found a means of emancipation from societal expectations within the communist parties in the 1920s through political dialogue and protest. The first signs of resistance to fascism and Nazism are evident within these fledgling parties: “After the war, their militancy continued as they organized and even led factory occupations and fought against the first Fascists bands. When the Italian Communist Party (PCI from *Partito Comunista Italiano*) was founded in 1921, many of the younger militant women became charter members.”<sup>28</sup>

The communist movement played a pivotal role in the motivations of many of the resistance fighters in the Second World War. For many female communists, however, the goal went beyond just repelling the Nazi invaders. These women sought to create a new social order within their communities:

Resistance members of both sexes had to deal with the dangers, tribulations, and failures of clandestine action. Women who joined underground movements have pointed out that in most instances they shared equal rights, equal responsibilities, and equal risks. Although not all *résistantes* shared her political vision, perhaps they instinctively agreed

with Brigitte Friand, who attributed this sharing to their common efforts to build a new society, one in which each would have full human dignity and equality—not just worker with bourgeois, but woman with man. In most respects, assignments were based on aptitude and ability. The enemy did not discriminate, either.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from the external struggle between the communists and fascist Nazis, the female members of the communist movement continued to struggle against the same cultural dogmas that other female resistance fighters encountered.

The 1920s and 1930s saw a rise in the Zionist movement among the European Jewry. While most Zionists lacked the political fortitude to take action to see their objectives come to fruition, there were idealists (similar to female communists) who sought their own form of Jewish utopia, and the actions of the Nazis became the catalyst for a more direct response. One such Zionist was Hungarian-born Hannah Szenes. Szenes actually fled Hungary prior to the Nazi occupation to escape persecution by the Hungarian anti-Semites. In 1943 she desired a return to Hungary to “organize emigration for young people and bring her mother out of Hungary.”<sup>30</sup> Szenes received parachute and military training from the British and in return agreed to assist Allied aviators to evade capture or escape as well as to gather intelligence for Britain.<sup>31</sup>

Shortly after she crossed the border into Hungary in 1944, the Germans captured and severely beat Szenes, including on “the palms of her hands and soles of her feet” to force her into divulging the location of her transmitter and codes.<sup>32</sup> She refused to reveal the transmitter’s whereabouts and continued to try to escape her captors. Despite brutal treatment at the hands of the Germans and Hungarians, Szenes refused to reveal any information. Her greatest display of bravery and final act of resistance against the Nazis occurred on 7 November 1944 when she refused a blindfold prior to her execution by firing squad. This ultimate act of defiance does not appear to be an isolated event among the women executed by the Nazis for their resistance. A number of female resistance fighters who faced capture chose death by their own hand in lieu of Nazi capture.<sup>33</sup>

The female Jewish resistance fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto engaged in active resistance through their involvement in the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB from *Zydowska Organizacja*

*Bojowa*), where they played a critical role during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. Details of their actual activities are limited since most of these women died either at the hands of the Germans, their fellow resistance fighters, or by their own hand during the uprising. Simha Rotem, a Warsaw Ghetto resistance fighter, acknowledged one woman, Dvora Baran, whom he described as “cut to the measure of the movement; in other words, she and the movement were one and the same.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite the harsh conditions of the ghetto, the two grew close. Baran died, however, on 3 May 1943 in the Franciszkanska Street bunker after the Germans had surrounded it. Rotem described the actions Baran took on the day prior to her death. Exploiting her femininity to achieve their tactical objectives, Baran’s commander “assigned her to go first and find a way of escape for the dozens of fighters still in the bunker. Surprising the Germans with her beauty and boldness, she caught them off guard and hurled a grenade into their ranks, thus allowing the fighters to leave the shelter.”<sup>35</sup> Baran, according to Rotem, further drew upon her inner resolve to lead and encourage the other fighters in the bunker. Rotem relates that Baran eloquently described their predicament and implored them to persist in their fight: “We can expect very hard battles and every day that passes is unbelievable. I still believe we can get even, even after a week of war. . . . Hold fast.”<sup>36</sup>

Unlike other European women, Jewish women had few options when dealing with the Nazis. Unless they could escape their German occupiers, only two options remained—resistance or compliance. Resistance was their only option if they wanted to defy the tragedy bestowed upon much of the European Jewish populace. Similarly, many Polish women found themselves with no other recourse than to fight the Germans or meet the same fate as the Jews, particularly following the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, which saw mass executions and war crimes perpetrated on the Polish people such as the massacre at Wola.<sup>37</sup> The few women survivors of that period in Polish history recollect witnessing the deaths of husbands, parents, and most horrific for a woman, the death of their children.<sup>38</sup>

Polish Zionists also chose to die by their own hand to avoid Nazi capture. Based on recollections from Rotem about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Rivka Pasmanik, a member of the

Zionist Youth, appears to have coordinated communications from outlying farms to resistance leadership in the ghetto. Since women were able to pass more easily through Nazi checkpoints in and out of the ghetto, Pasmanik (and others like her) chose to serve as couriers if they did not look Jewish.<sup>39</sup> Pasmanik, at some point, joined the ZOB and ended up in the ghetto where she eventually took the life of another female resistance fighter before shooting herself.<sup>40</sup> Pasmanik, in a quest to retain her dignity, wanted a death of her choosing versus capture, torture (and possibly betraying her fellow resistance fighters to the Germans as a result), and ultimately execution by the Nazis.

### **The End Results**

Thus, the vast majority of known female anti-Nazi resistance fighters derived their motivation to resist from closely held beliefs and experiences, whether they were based on religious faith, political objectives, German brutality, or a combination of all three. Women like Szenes, Baran, and Pasmanik each met their fate with dignity, fighting their enemies to their last breath. Through their acts of resistance, these women demonstrated that the traditional societal roles afforded women no longer dictated their behavior as warriors.

Actually killing themselves for the cause of liberation was not a primary tactic used by the female resisters of Nazi-occupied Europe, unlike the suicide tactics of the more recent terrorist organizations (like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE], Hamas, or Chechen rebels). But, for example, a woman who “sheltered someone sought by the Gestapo [from *Geheime Staatspolizei*, the German Secret State Police]—a political refugee, a Jew, an Allied aviator, or a *résistant*—risked death if caught (some were executed).”<sup>41</sup> These women were certainly willing to risk their lives and the lives of their families for their cause and beliefs, much like the men fighting on the battlefield or along side the female resistance fighters.

Regardless of individual motivations, the role women played in the defeat of the Nazis should not be ignored. Insurgents and terrorists groups now employ, with increasing success, many of the tactics and advantages used by female resistance fight-

ers in World War II. Appreciating the devotion and the lengths to which women under Nazi occupation were willing to go to defeat their enemy enables modern military and political strategists to better address that part of the population often overlooked when planning and conducting military operations. The legacy left behind by the female resistance fighters is that their “wartime activities [were] personally *liberating* despite pervasive fears and almost paralyzing anxieties. None regrets her choice to fight or to be in the thick of the fighting. They would, to the woman, do it all over again. But they hope no one will have to in the future” (emphasis added).<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, the Allies did defeat the Nazis, but questions remain about the impact of resistance groups and specifically female resistance fighters upon that victory. While history has glamorized the role the resistance played in the liberation of Europe, it remains clear “the Resistance had played a major role in the defeat of the Germans and had hastened the liberation” of France and ultimately, all of Europe.<sup>43</sup>

While the Nazis certainly regarded the female resistance fighters as terrorists, the women who struggled against fascism considered themselves freedom fighters who sought a quicker end to the war. The Nazis, for the most part, failed to acknowledge the use of women in the resistance movement even though they captured and executed numerous female resistance fighters. Resistance fighters used this narrow view to their advantage, capitalizing on their femininity.<sup>44</sup> Modern terrorists and insurgents continue to exploit this cultural weakness to their advantage. For example, an Iraqi woman, according to a Fox News broadcast on 10 April 2007, with explosives under her *abaya* easily entered a police station, detonated her bomb, and killed 16 Iraqis. Just as Jewish resistor, Dvora Baran, used her female attributes to distract German soldiers to engage them in combat, modern female insurgents capitalize on female mannerism to attack their enemies.

These women conducted their final acts, considered acts of martyrdom or at the very least heroic by many of their cultures, without regret and inspired more women to take similar actions. Understanding this dedication to their cause, whether it is the dedication displayed by a woman in the face of Nazi brutality during interrogation or a woman with bombs strapped to

her torso entering a military checkpoint, enables military strategists to plan for appropriate defensive operations to protect against the catastrophic results of suicide terrorism.

### Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

1. Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 2.
2. Elshtain, *Women and War*, 169.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 178.
5. Kirk and McElligott, *Opposing Fascism*, 10.
6. Elshtain, *Women and War*, 179.
7. Ibid., 175.
8. Sevier, *Resistance Fighter*, 5.
9. Ibid., 44.
10. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 2.
11. Ibid., 9.
12. Ibid.
13. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 10.
14. Ravensbrück was known as the women's concentration camp. It was also the site of the execution of four Special Operations Executive female members (Lilian Rolfe, Denise Bloch, Cecily LeForte, and Violette Szabo).
15. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 2.
16. Ibid., 9.
17. Ibid.
18. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 17.
19. Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 57.
20. Elshtain, *Women and War*, 179.
21. Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 56.
22. Ibid.
23. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, 54.
24. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 13.
25. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 7.
26. Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 18.
27. Ibid., 19.
28. Ibid., 16.
29. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 11.
30. Cosner and Cosner, *Women under the Third Reich*, 156.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 157.
33. Ibid.
34. Kazik, *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter*, 27.
35. Ibid., 26.
36. Ibid., 28.

37. Wola, a district of Warsaw, was the site of a large massacre of Polish citizens following the Warsaw Uprising. One victim, a pregnant mother of two small children, recalled being dragged out into the open where she was forced to watch the Germans execute her two crying children, which caused her to faint. When she awoke, she pretended to be dead and finally crawled away to escape the horrific scene. Central Commission, *German Crimes in Poland*.

38. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*.

39. Kazik, *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter*, 17.

40. Kurzman, *The Bravest Battle*, 306.

41. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 10.

42. Elshtain, *Women and War*, 177.

43. Sevier, *Resistance Fighter*, xv.

44. Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 1.





## Chapter 3

### **The Soviet Female Fliers of World War II**

*Just as the Greek term for courage is elided to the word for man, in Russian bravery is by definition masculine.*

—Jean Bethke Elshtain

Amazons. The mention of the word evokes images of tall, strong, combative women who abandoned femininity and the protection of male companions to live as their own tribe. Most assume that these are merely mythical tales about female warriors, yet greater writers such as Homer and Plato described a tribe of these women living in the southern areas of the former Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Archeological evidence supports the idea that women participated in battle, particularly among Sarmatian women, who made their homes in present day Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia. The majority of female graves from the period 300–200 BC excavated in these areas contained various weapons and armor, an indication that Sarmatian women participated in combat.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Soviet Context**

Over the centuries, Russian culture has embraced and even glorified the female warrior ethos. While the role of these *polianitsy* or warrior heroines diminished as more stringent patriarchal cultures emerged, the legends of female fighters remained a part of Russian culture.<sup>3</sup> It appears that whenever the Motherland of Russia came under the threat of invading forces, women stood to fight alongside Russian men. One such woman, Nadezhda Durova, led Russian cavalry against French forces during the Napoléonic Wars (disguised as a man) and received the Cross of Saint George for her contributions.<sup>4</sup>

Women actively joined the fight during World War I as well. Nearly 400 women took up arms in infantry and aviation roles as early as 1915 and by the time of the 1917 revolution, mili-

tary services actively recruited female combatants.<sup>5</sup> Maria Bochkareva, who enlisted in the infantry prior to the revolution, advised the Russian war minister on how to improve morale among Russian soldiers along the front. Bochkareva suggested the creation of an all-female regiment to demonstrate to the men how to conduct combat operations. Bochkareva suggested that the 300 women (from over 2,000 volunteers) of the "Women's Battalion of Death" would "shame the men in the trenches" when women willingly went over the top.<sup>6</sup>

Bochkareva's battalion went into action in an effort to spur male units to engage; however, their mission failed to elicit much response on the part of their male contemporaries. Despite this failure, Russian leadership appears to have accepted the concept and other all-female units were "formed under the Russian provisional government in Petrograd, Moscow, Odessa, Ekaterinodar, and Perm."<sup>7</sup> Further, the Russian public appears also to have accepted the notion of female units. In June 1917, citizens of Petrograd gathered to honor Bochkareva's battalion in a solemn ceremony and treated its leader as a hero.<sup>8</sup>

The Russian Civil War provided further opportunities for women to become involved in combat operations. The Workers' and Peasants' Air Fleet, for example, desperately sought pilots to fight against the anti-Bolshevik forces and did not object to the use of women in combat roles. Marxist ideology promoted equality among the sexes and while "not obligated to military services, the new Soviet woman was certainly free to participate in the revolution and Civil War."<sup>9</sup> The struggle of women in a patriarchal society paralleled the struggle of workers against capitalism; the leaders of the communist revolution found willing supporters and participants among the disenfranchised half of the population. Communist leaders propagated the belief that once the revolution succeeded "men and women naturally would become equals; there could be no gender discrimination in a socialist state."<sup>10</sup>

Under the Bolshevik leadership, Russian women gained what few other women had: equality. The Provisional Government had previously granted women equality under the law, which provided them with improved educational and professional opportunities.<sup>11</sup> The Bolsheviks championed the theory that Marxist socialism would resolve all societal difficulties. The Bolshe-

viks equated the establishment of a socialist government with the creation of a utopian society where men accepted "women in combat as a matter of course, without sexist resistance or pious welcome speeches."<sup>12</sup>

As revolutionary fervor diminished and Soviet power ascended, women once again returned to their familiar roles as nurturers encouraged by their Soviet leadership especially under Stalin. Fortunately, Soviet educational opportunities provided to women in the 1920s and 1930s allowed a number of women to receive flying training. Most of these women received civilian training through aero clubs, although a select few received their training from the military, and Soviet women accomplished several civilian aerial achievements, including the nonstop flight of the *Rodina* ("Motherland" in Russian).<sup>13</sup> Crewed by three women, the *Rodina* broke the women's international record for flight over a straight-line distance and established a new nonstop flight record of just over 26 hours.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the three women each held commissions in the Soviet air force only added to the propaganda value of the flight. Further, the navigator on the *Rodina*, Maj Marina Raskova, survived alone for 10 days in the subarctic forests of Russia on a couple of candy bars and wild berries following her bail out prior to the *Rodina's* emergency landing. Raskova immediately became a heroine within the Soviet Union, and Stalin himself propagated this heroic image. At a dinner celebration, Stalin reportedly stated that the crew of the *Rodina* "avenged the heavy centuries of the oppression of women."<sup>15</sup> Despite his insistence that the role of Soviet women remained entrenched in the traditional expectations of life givers and nurturers, the accomplishments of Raskova and her fellow aviators appear to have intrigued Stalin.

While Stalin appears to have indulged the escapades of Raskova, his interests resided primarily in the accomplishments of Soviet aviators, male and female, and less in the aspect of promoting Marxist gender equality.<sup>16</sup> The rise of fascism and threat of German invasion returned women to nontraditional roles and provided an incentive for social acceptance of women in these roles. The feats of female aviators in particular served to inspire the Soviet public, and the adulation women such as Raskova received "can only be compared to that of American film stars of the period, but with the added aura of the war-

rior.”<sup>17</sup> The popularity and proven capabilities of female aviators, nested in Amazonian legends and Marxist ideology, provided the impetus for the first state-sanctioned use of women in combat. At the request of Hero of the Soviet Union Raskova, Stalin agreed to establish three all-female aviation groups.<sup>18</sup>

### **Hitler Invades the Soviet Union**

Despite the popularity of the female military officers of the *Rodina*, when Hitler initiated Operation Barbarossa there were very few women in the Soviet military.<sup>19</sup> While not specifically denied acceptance into the military by any government regulation, Soviet military leadership discouraged women from volunteering for active military service and often turned volunteers away. Instead, Soviet leadership encouraged women volunteers to join paramilitary groups to receive various types of military training, including flight training. Sponsored by the Soviet Komsomol (a communist youth organization), Soviet women maintained higher levels of fitness through military-related sports, received weapons training to include sport sharp shooting, and even flight training for some.<sup>20</sup> In response to the German invasion in June 1941, military training opportunities for women increased. The Administration for Universal Military Training of the People's Commissariat of Defense sponsored 110 hours of military training for women beginning in October 1941.<sup>21</sup> This training provided the Soviet Union with an extensive reserve force to help resist the invading German armies. By 1942, these paramilitary groups throughout the Soviet Union had trained over 220,000 women in military operations; the German invasion forced the *Osoaviakhim* (Organization for the Promotion of Defense and Aviation-Chemistry Construction) to provide further training in specific military specialties.<sup>22</sup>

Raskova sought to tap this wealth of fighting potential and used her influence with Stalin and the defense ministry to persuade them to press forward with female aviation units. A number of female veterans further suggest that public pressure heavily contributed to the decision to create the units, claiming that it was only due to their consistent demands for acceptance that the military finally ceded to their wishes.<sup>23</sup> The Nazi invasion only increased the fervor among Soviet women to join the

military and defend their nation. Women, particularly female instructor pilots, inundated Raskova with requests to join her units or asked how they could “put their skills to use in the service of their country—more particularly, how they could get to the front, preferably in an airforce [sic] unit.”<sup>24</sup> The accounts of these female veterans reveal that a “fever of patriotism” compelled them into action, similar to the response of American men following the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor.<sup>25</sup> With evidence of such strong devotion to the Motherland, coupled with extensive flying experience since Raskova required a minimum of 500 flying hours for those who desired to fly fighter or bomber aircraft, Stalin agreed to establish the 122nd Composite Air Group.<sup>26</sup> Three all-female regiments comprised the unit: the 586th Fighter Regiment, the 587th Bomber Regiment, and the 588th Air Regiment.

### **The 586th Fighter Regiment**

The Soviets activated the 586th Fighter Regiment in April 1942 and assigned it to defend Saratov on the Volga River; the unit would later play a critical role during the Battle of Stalingrad.<sup>27</sup> The first commander of the 586th, Maj Tamara Kazarinova, led the unit for six months. Kazarinova and her sister, Militsia, had both served on Raskova’s staff and were among the few career female Soviet military officers.<sup>28</sup> There appears to be a dispute as to why air force leadership removed Kazarinova from command. Some veterans of the unit testified that Kazarinova and her sister were stern disciplinarians and had disagreeable personalities, yet the official explanation remains that Kazarinova had medical issues that inhibited her command abilities.<sup>29</sup> Kazarinova did not fly while assigned to the 586th, which was not representative of the contributions of her unit’s female members. Just as male aviators in air forces across the globe in that era chafed under the authority of nonflying leaders, Kazarinova’s demonstrated lack of fighter skills put her at odds with many of the experienced pilots under her command. This led to the assignment of Kazarinova’s most vocal opposition to male units.<sup>30</sup>

According to a 1993 interview with Kazarinova’s successor, Alexander V. Gridnev, Lilya Litvyal and Katya Budanova had requested Kazarinova’s removal for “not being suitable for fill-

ing the position.”<sup>31</sup> Their request, in conjunction with the requests of other prestigious pilots in the unit, created a strong rift between Kazarinova and her squadron leadership. This rift, according to Gridnev, explains to some extent the logic behind assigning these experienced pilots to male units since their re-assignment essentially removed the “troublemakers.”<sup>32</sup> The troublemakers, however, proved to be formidable pilots against the Luftwaffe.

Litvyak, initially assigned to the 586th, flew with the 437th Fighter Regiment, the 9th Guards Fighter Regiment, and eventually with the 73rd Fighter Regiment of the 6th Guards Air Division of the Eighth Air Army. All three regiments were regular military units.<sup>33</sup> Litvyak’s name appears throughout the limited literature on this subject, and within the former Soviet Union Litvyak remains a heroine to her people. During a temporary assignment to the 73rd, Litvyak and fellow “troublemaker” Budanova, flew as wingmen to veteran male pilots. Both pilots proved their abilities and earned the right to conduct “lone wolf” or freelance operations just like the best male pilots of the 73rd.<sup>34</sup> Lone-wolf missions involved individual fighters patrolling without the support of wingmen or any form of backup. Similar to fighter sweep tactics, lone wolf missions sought out the enemy to engage them in air-to-air combat.<sup>35</sup> The fact that both women conducted lone-wolf missions attests to their capabilities as pilots, since sending poorly skilled pilots on such risky missions most likely would have resulted in the loss of much needed aircraft and skilled aviators.

Litvyak always had a passion for flying and began her early training in the profession by sneaking into the local aero club at night.<sup>36</sup> By the time the war began, Litvyak had mastered flying and risen to instructor pilot. As German bombers began to make their runs over Moscow, an enraged Litvyak sought to join an operational unit but officials ordered her to evacuate instead.<sup>37</sup> The formation of Raskova’s female units provided Litvyak with the opportunity to defend her nation and she jumped at the opportunity.

After mastering the Yakovlev Yak-9 fighter in training, Litvyak quickly demonstrated her abilities during her first sortie over Stalingrad with the 437th. Following her flight lead and squad-

ron commander and fellow female pilot, Raya Belyayeva, Litvyak engaged a flight of Luftwaffe Focke-Wulf 190s and successfully shot one down.<sup>38</sup> When Belyayeva ran out of ammunition while under attack, Litvyak shot down a German Messerschmitt aircraft to defend her commander.<sup>39</sup> After this historic first action in which she became the first woman fighter pilot to shoot down an enemy aircraft, Litvyak met one of the pilots she had shot down. The POW was a decorated ace of the German Air Fleet 4 who vehemently denied that a woman had shot him down. Upon hearing the details of her account, the astounded pilot had to admit that Litvyak had indeed bested him in aerial combat.<sup>40</sup> Litvyak herself went on to become an ace and participated in a number of notable air battles over Stalingrad and beyond. Litvyak amassed 12 confirmed kills and assisted in the downing of two more before the Germans shot her down.<sup>41</sup>

Litvyak's close friend and fellow member of the famous 9th Guards Fighter Regiment, Budanova also flourished as a pilot in this prestigious unit. To gain entry into the 9th Guards, pilots had to already be aces or have the demonstrated ace potential.<sup>42</sup> Similar to Litvyak, Budanova had always been enthralled by flying and sought to become a pilot despite her mother's reservations. Budanova joined the Kiev aero club just prior to the war and devoted herself to perfecting her skills. When the Germans invaded, Budanova "realized that her flying above the tiny airfield near Moscow was but a preparation for something important and irrevocable she was about to do. She decided in the very first few days of the war to devote her life, knowledge, and experience to service in the great cause of bringing about victory over the enemy."<sup>43</sup> Clearly, Budanova's motivations rested in the love of her country and her experience as a pilot provided her with the opportunity to defend her nation. The contributions of Litvyak and Budanova provide evidence regarding three aspects of the role of Soviet women in the Great Patriotic War: they also held strong nationalistic views, they sought to defend their nation against invaders, and they could effectively operate in combat and succeed despite their gender.



## **125th Guards Bomber Aviation Regiment (Originally designated the 587th Bomber Aviation Regiment)**

The regiment initially commanded by Marina Raskova began its service in January 1943 at the height of Germany's siege of Stalingrad flying the Petlyakov Pe-2, a twin-engine dive-bomber. Raskova's tenure as commander ended prematurely when she crashed her aircraft during severe weather en route to the unit's reassignment to the western front.<sup>44</sup> Despite the devastating loss, the regiment endured and went on to serve with distinction for the remainder of the war. Many veterans of the unit expressed heightened fears that Raskova's death would signal an end to the female units, so they continued to prepare themselves for combat over Stalingrad.<sup>45</sup> Their preparations enabled the unit to achieve a number of notable military successes, and the "regiment was rewarded for its successful actions in the North Caucasus by being named after this, its first, remarkable commander."<sup>46</sup>

Raskova's replacement, Maj Valentin Markov, served as the regiment's commander until its disbandment in February 1947. Initially unhappy with his assignment to the female unit, Markov remained loyal to the women who proved themselves formidable fighters for the Soviet Union.<sup>47</sup> Markov, better than anyone, understood the male assumptions about the female fighters. Upon his selection as the 125th commander, his friends regarded him with pity and felt his career was over.<sup>48</sup> The initial response to his command met with equal disappointment; the women of the 125th did not want a male commander anymore than their male commander wanted a female regiment. As Markov and the women of the 125th adjusted to each other, Markov marveled at the work ethic and dedication demonstrated by everyone in the regiment. He recalled that "sometimes, seeing how the girl armorers hung heavy bombs from the aircraft, how the mechanics prepared the airplanes at night, in snowstorms and frost, I thought: 'well okay, we men are supposed to do all this . . . but them?! How they, who for the most part are still girls . . . how they must love our homeland!'"<sup>49</sup>

After repeated demonstrations of their flying abilities and extensive training programs implemented by Markov, the 125th

soon experienced success in the skies over the western front. The male units assigned to Stalingrad looked askance at the 125th when it arrived at an airfield on the Volga River.<sup>50</sup> According to squadron navigator, Galina Ol'khovskaia, "they met us with distrust in the division. The male pilots could not accept the idea that, just like men, some girls had mastered complicated equipment and would be able to complete any sort of combat mission."<sup>51</sup> Combat successes rapidly changed the opinions of the male aviators. Further, Markov frequently arranged training tests during breaks in combat operations to prove the abilities of the women to other male regiments.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, men from other regiments began to regard their aviation sisters as competent aviators, if not as equal combatants.

Unlike the other two units that flew antiquated aircraft, the 125th flew the latest innovation in Soviet bombers, the Pe-2.<sup>53</sup> The Pe-2 was a difficult aircraft to fly and required a three-person crew. Despite the physical challenges of flying the Pe-2, the women of the 125th demonstrated remarkable flying skills even under dire circumstances. A difficult plane to land under normal situations, the Pe-2 became very unstable during emergency conditions. On one occasion during the 1944 summer offensive, Lena Malyutina received severe wounds from a shell fragment that rendered her unconscious.<sup>54</sup> Her navigator, Lena Yushina, and tail gunner, Sasha Sychova, managed to stabilize the aircraft and revive Malyutina. Malyutina, struggling to remain conscious for the remainder of the flight, managed to land the aircraft successfully. According to a later account,

Lena did not see the airfield. Everything swam and rocked before her eyes, and only her body, trained in the course of hundreds of flights, felt the machine and her hands and legs automatically reacted by operating the control wheel and the pedals. Her ability to react was growing weaker and each of her motions was resulting in an unbearable pain, but she exerted all her strength, forcing herself to hold on and to fight for the lives of her friends who had refused to abandon her. At best, any landing of the Pe-2 was tricky and the seriously wounded pilot was very much afraid of an excessive airspeed loss during the descent, which could have resulted in the machine falling into a fatal spin. Her last thought was, before passing out again: "I landed after all."<sup>55</sup>

Following a two-month recovery, Malyutina rejoined the 125th and continued to fly missions until the end of the war. Malyutina,

along with her crew, would fly sorties over Riga, Liepaja, Klaipeda, and Koenigsberg, and “fought side by side with the pilots of [Charles] de Gaulle’s Normandie-Niemen Regiment.”<sup>56</sup>

***The Night Witches:***  
**The 46th Taman Guards Night**  
**Bomber Aviation Regiment**  
**(Formerly the 588th Night**  
**Bomber Regiment)**

The 46th became the most famous of the Soviet female units and the Germans rewarded their efforts by calling them the “Night Witches (*Nachthexen*).”<sup>57</sup> A fictional tale of the unit entitled *The Night Witches* by Bruce Myles is often cited as an official account of the unit and its female members. The 46th flew the decrepit Polikarpov Po-2 (also known by an earlier designation, U-2) in combat missions that included the defense of Stalingrad, Sevastopol, and Minsk, and offensive missions over Warsaw and Berlin.<sup>58</sup> The 46th had only one commander during its existence, Evdokia Bershanskaia. In addition to the tactical call sign awarded the unit by the Germans, the unit also remained singularly distinctive from the other units created by Raskova. As each veteran of the unit attests, the unit “was the only one of the original three regiments that remained all-female throughout the war, and to have its campaign record examined systematically in several books.”<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps it was because of its status as an all-female unit that the 46th flew the outdated Po-2, despite the desire of most of its pilots to fly more advanced fighters. The Po-2 was a wooden, open cockpit biplane that could only fly at night due to its vulnerability to flak. Undeterred by the aircraft’s limitations, the women of the 46th continuously sought to improve their tactical skills in the fragile little Po-2.

Although the 46th would soon prove their worth as combatants, the men within the Soviet air forces and army initially regarded the unit with disgust and trepidation. On one occasion, Soviet male pilots harassed a formation of the 46th during flight and caused them to scatter.<sup>60</sup> Military leadership also frowned upon the unit even though communist ideology espoused the

idea of gender equality. In spite of the lofty political rhetoric, in reality, gender evoked the assumption that they were merely "little girls," and the Po-2 was all they could handle.<sup>61</sup>

The women of the 46th soon proved their worth in the war. At the height of the German invasion during the siege of Stalingrad, the 46th engaged in their first combat sorties. Often equipped with only four to six small bombs and gliding to their targets with their engines cut off, the women of the 46th successfully harassed German troop supply lines and provided critical reconnaissance information.<sup>62</sup> The psychological effects of the night-bombing raids often exceeded the actual physical destruction. According to Reina Pennington, historian of Soviet aviation, the Germans admitted the unpredictability of the raids "reduced the already short rest of the troops and had an adverse effect on supply operations."<sup>63</sup>

The limited range of the Po-2 forced the unit to operate close to the front line, so the 46th flew shorter sorties. This provided them with the opportunity to quickly turn their aircraft and crews to put more sorties in the air and more bombs on target with an average crew "flying five to ten missions each night."<sup>64</sup> Until the end of the war, most Po-2s had no weapons other than their bombs and no parachutes, compounding the rigorous demands of nighttime combat flying. Yet, the women of the 46th continued to fly and fight successfully. In order to maintain or increase their harassment of the Germans, the regiment took on "increasingly more difficult tasks aimed at slowing down the enemy advance by bombing his rail and motor transport. They bombed all night long; yet, in addition to reconnoitering, they flew daytime liaison missions to assist in command and control of troops, and transported high commanders. They slept almost anywhere; on the ground under the wing, in haystacks, and in sheds."<sup>65</sup> According to 46th veteran, Polina Gelman, the motivation to continue went beyond the demands of nationalism or self-preservation. Gelman explained, "that's the way it is in war. Whoever didn't want to be there could leave. There weren't any people like that in our regiment. Only the dying and the wounded left. And the wounded, after the hospital, even despite the protests of the doctor returned to the regiment and continued to fight and even to perish."<sup>66</sup>

One explanation for this devotion comes from the regiment's former chief of staff, Irina Rakobolskaia. When asked why the women of the 46th flew so many missions, Rakobolskaia simply responded, "Out of enthusiasm . . . to prove that we could do anything."<sup>67</sup> Rakobolskaia also described the methods the 46th used to replace women lost in combat while ensuring that the unit remained exclusively female. According to Rakobolskaia, the regiment "began to train our own personnel as replacements."<sup>68</sup>

The Po-2 actually provided the 46th with the means to train replacements. As a training aircraft, it had dual controls, enabling navigators to train as pilots during their missions. Rakobolskaia described the training regimen as self-generated; navigators trained as pilots on return flights from missions, mechanics trained as navigators, and weapons loaders trained to become mechanics.<sup>69</sup> As more women volunteered to defend the Motherland, recruits to the 46th entered as weapons loaders and worked their way up to pilot. The ramifications of this innovation in training occurred when Yevdokia Nosal received a fatal wound to the head and her navigator, Irina Kashirina, had to land the aircraft.<sup>70</sup>

Nosal's story represents the tragedies that befell many women involved in the war. During the early stages of the German invasion, Nosal lost her newborn son during a German bombing raid in Belorussia that destroyed the hospital where she gave birth.<sup>71</sup> After barely surviving the hospital's destruction and her journey home, Nosal volunteered to serve at the front to seek revenge for the death of her son and for the destruction of her beloved homeland.<sup>72</sup> Nosal received the regiment's first Hero of the Soviet Union award posthumously.

In February 1943, the regiment received its first of many accolades from the Soviet leadership. In recognition of their successes in combat over Stalingrad, the North Caucasus Front, and in the Kuban, the 588th officially received its Guards designation.<sup>73</sup> The unit flew over 24,000 missions and 23 of its members became heroes of the Soviet Union, a testament to the capabilities of female combatants.<sup>74</sup>

## **The End Result**

While the women of Raskova's regiments and others who served amid traditional male units proved themselves as equally

capable as all-male aircrews, the Soviet government stood down the female units after the war's conclusion. Some of the female combatants successfully continued careers within the Soviet military, but most returned to their civilian lives. The experience did leave a lasting impact on the female Soviet psyche: many women continued to demonstrate their equality to men, despite a lack of support from the Soviet government.

One veteran of the 46th, Marina Chechneva, continued to fly even after the birth of her first child and death of her pilot husband. Even though the government demobilized her from the military reserves, "she devoted herself to flying as a sport, in an attempt to show that here too, women were men's equals."<sup>75</sup> Chechneva validated her belief in female equality. She established a number of flying records and her instrument and landing skills in the Yakovlev Yak-18 earned her the title of "Champion of the USSR for 1953."<sup>76</sup> After her flying career ended, Chechneva continued to promote gender equality. An established Communist Party member, she represented a number of Soviet committees within her nation and abroad. In 1968, the department of history of the Plekhanov Institute awarded her "the title of Candidate of Historical Sciences" for her dissertation on Soviet women combatants in World War II.<sup>77</sup>

Other female veterans also went on to proclaim the contributions of women during the Great Patriotic War. Mariya Smirnova of 46th Taman Guards Night Bomber Regiment, also forced into the reserves after the war, continued to speak to Soviet youths and service members about the role women played in the Soviet victory.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the attempts to highlight the contributions of women during the war, the Soviet public and military apparently knew very little about the female combatants. Maj Marta Meritus of the 125th regiment described a reunion for veterans following the war: "The commander of the front, under whom we fought during the war, asked why we had been asked to this reception and who we were. We had to explain that we were the pilots and mechanics of the 125th regiment. He had thought it to be a male regiment, and it surprised him to learn about us after the war. Even now, very few men can believe that women crews could fly the dive bomber."<sup>79</sup> Western reactions, until recently, were even further dismissive.

According to Kazimiera Cottam, Western scholars tended to regard female Soviet combatants as merely Soviet propaganda and accounts of “female success in the military are often dismissed as anecdotal, propaganda-type stories.”<sup>80</sup> The Soviet government and military did little to dispel such assumptions. Despite historical female successes in combat, the Soviet government continued to deny women, for the most part, access to military schools and careers.<sup>81</sup> Currently, the Russian military has very few women in its ranks and very few female pilots. As recently as the early 1990s, Svetlana Protasova had to beg Boris Yeltsin and defense minister Pavel Grachev for admittance into the Russian Air Force and permission to fly the prestigious Mikoyan and Gurevich MiG-29.<sup>82</sup>

More recently, Russian president Vladimir Putin highlighted the Russian army’s “Beauties in Shoulder-Straps” competition to select the prettiest woman in the Army.<sup>83</sup> The aim of the beauty pageant was not to recruit more women to serve in the Russian armed forces, but merely to lift the morale of the male majority of service members and recruit more men to the fight in Chechnya. Although Russia has a rich history of women successfully serving in combat, their modern armed forces represent a more conservative approach to women in uniform and in combat.

Russian defense ministry officials also cite recent military experiences with women in combat in Chechnya that support these conservative policies. During the 1990s, half of the conscripts in the Russian Army were women and many of these served in combat positions, including machine gunnery positions.<sup>84</sup> The performance by these female combat troops bodes ill for future female combat inclusion. According to Gen Vladimir Konstantinov of the Organizational-Mobilization Main Directorate of the General Staff, “in 1999 all female contract soldiers of the Leningrad Military District 138th and 200th Permanent Readiness Motor-Rifle Brigades refused to go to fight with their units in the second Chechen campaign, causing immense problems in refitting the units with men.”<sup>85</sup> The Defense Ministry reports that the current percentage of female recruits is holding steady at 24 percent and that in future operations, the ministry will exclude women from combat operations.<sup>86</sup> While the future for Russian women serving in combat remains bleak,

recent developments suggest the roles of women in the Russian military may yet improve. In March of this year, Vladimir Putin appointed Lyubov Kudelina to the post of deputy minister of defense, the first woman in Russian or Soviet history to serve in such a position.<sup>87</sup> Putin has tasked Kudelina with rooting out corruption and reigning in a careening defense budget to bring some stability to the military. Kudelina, if successful, could pave the way for more Russian women to serve in the military the way Raskova did in the last century.

### Notes

1. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. Noggle, *Dance with Death*, 4.
5. Ibid.
6. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 5.
7. Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 4.
8. Stockdale, "My Death for the Motherland Is Happiness."
9. Noggle, *Dance with Death*, 5.
10. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 8.
11. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, xviii.
12. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 9.
13. Noggle, *Dance with Death*, 6.
14. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 25.
15. Ibid., 26.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Despite the propaganda the all-female units provided Soviet leaders, few Western and Russian academics have conducted extensive research into this aspect of Soviet history. Further, until the fall of the Soviet Union, Western historians had limited access to official documentation. What little documentation that exists is in Russian. Thus, the majority of this research has depended on the efforts of three women: Reina Pennington, Kazimiera Janina Cottam, and Anne Noggle. In the course of my research, I came across contradictions in unit designations, spelling of names, and translations of interviews and speeches. I have done my best to provide the most accepted interpretations of the data provided.
19. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 31.
20. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, xix.
21. Ibid., xix-xx.
22. Ibid., xix.
23. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 36.
24. Noggle, *Dance with Death*, 7.



25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 8.
28. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 46.
29. Ibid., 145.
30. Ibid., 148.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 149.
33. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 6.
34. Ibid.
35. Maj Paul Spaven, F-15C pilot, interviewed by the author, 4 February 2008.
36. Cottam, *In the Sky above the Front*, 222.
37. Ibid., 224.
38. Ibid., 226.
39. Ibid.
40. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, 150.
41. Noggle, *Dance with Death*, 157.
42. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, 150.
43. Cottam, *In the Sky above the Front*, 196.
44. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 12.
45. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 135.
46. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 12.
47. Cottam, *In the Sky above the Front*, 21.
48. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 137.
49. Ibid., 139.
50. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 12.
51. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 136.
52. Ibid., 143.
53. Ibid., 130.
54. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 14.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 115.
58. Ibid.
59. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 15.
60. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 119.
61. Ibid.
62. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 19.
63. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 123.
64. Ibid.
65. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, 20.
66. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 124.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 125.
69. Ibid., 126.
70. Cottam, *In the Sky above the Front*, 75.

71. Ibid., 73.
72. Ibid., 74.
73. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 125.
74. Ibid., 115.
75. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, 47.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., 48.
78. Ibid., 114.
79. Noggle, *Dance with Death*, 137.
80. Cottam and Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat*, xii.
81. Ibid., xiii.
82. O'Neill, "Russian Women Aviators."
83. Bigg, "Russia."
84. Felgenhauer, "Russian Military."
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. "Russia: New Deputy Defense Minister Breaks Mold."



## Chapter 4

### ***Shahida in a Brave New World***

*One of the most surprising developments has been the way in which suicide terrorism has opened the stage for the entry of female combatants, who are increasingly involved in what was once a male dominated arena.*

—Clara Beyler

Most Americans associate the global war on terror (GWOT) with the current conflict between Western secular ideals and radicalized Islamic traditionalists. The American press and media continue to reinforce this notion. However, organizations have used terrorism as a “threat or use of physical coercion, primarily against noncombatants, especially civilians, to create fear to achieve various political objectives” throughout history.<sup>1</sup> Terrorism serves as a tool for oppressed peoples and groups seeking political upheaval, but state actors also often resort to terrorism to control their populations. In the modern era, both the oppressed and oppressors have used terrorism without mercy and without limit.

### **Context Still Matters— Societal Expectations in the Modern Age of Terrorism**

While the American press has focused upon the terrorism implemented by a single transnational terrorist group, al-Qaeda, the reality is that terrorism and more specifically, insurgent terrorism exists throughout the world. Bard O’Neill, director of studies of insurgencies and revolution at the National War College, contrasts the transnational terrorism of al-Qaeda, using the entire world as a battlefield, with the more defined insurgent terrorism of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah who have a specific enemy, Israel. The American press initially used the term “insurgency” to describe the current conflict in Iraq; however, the situation is much more complicated than a simple

insurgency. O'Neill defines insurgent terrorism as an attempt to overthrow a state, to

erode the psychological support by instilling fear into officials and their domestic and international supporters. In the short term, terrorists often pursue one or more objectives such as extracting particular concessions (e.g., payment of ransom or the release of prisoners), gaining publicity, undermining or seeking to join a negotiating process, demoralizing the population through the creation of a widespread disorder, provoking repression by the government, *enforcing obedience and cooperation from those inside and outside the movement*, enhancing the political stature of specific factions within an insurgent movement, and fulfilling the need to avenge losses inflicted upon the movement.<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added)

An insurgency certainly exists within Iraq, primarily of Sunni Muslims, against the US-sponsored government. However, there are also elements of the transnational terrorism of al-Qaeda, of international terrorism sponsored by states such as Iran, of secular rivalries between competing ideologies, and of religious conflicts between the Shia majority and the Kurdish and Sunni minorities. What Americans may refer to as terrorism, Iraqis may refer to simply as resistance.

Americans further assume that the religion of Mohammad seeks to relegate women to subservient roles and that most Muslim women would resist this subjugation, if able, as Americans did in the women's suffrage and equal rights movements. These assumptions are incorrect. In the traditions of the three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, arising out of the Middle East, the role of a woman remains subservient to the man of the household. While male children, male nonbelievers, and male servants can rise above their initial positions of inferiority through age, conversion, and emancipation, women remain "irredeemably fixed in [their] inferiority."<sup>3</sup>

Islam initially improved the condition of Arab women and many modern female Muslims believe that Islam protects and uplifts its female believers. When Mohammad first introduced the Koran to ancient Arabia, the religion "brought enormous improvement in the position of women," and provided women "with property and some other rights."<sup>4</sup> Islam further provided women with "a measure of protection against ill treatment by their husbands or owners."<sup>5</sup> Many Muslim women believe their religion continues to protect them. A German Web site,

Qantara.de, geared toward creating understanding between Western ideals and Islam, describes how Hamas supported schools in the Palestinian territories. A student at the University of Nablus, Alaa, explained that their oppression did not derive from Islam but instead flowed from Israeli occupying forces. "Out there [outside her window] is the Israeli military. It's dangerous [there]. Islam and its regulations protect us."<sup>6</sup>

The *hijab* or veil has come to symbolize this struggle between the traditions of Islam and modern Western ideals. French government attempts to remove the veil from Algerian women during Algeria's war for independence actually resulted (in addition to other, more gruesome, consequences such as rape) in women joining the Algerian resistance movement. In ceremonies across Algeria, French military and colonial leaders *encouraged* women to unveil themselves in front of crowds of their fellow Algerians and Muslims.<sup>7</sup> The steps taken by the French military to emancipate Algerian women from the cultural and societal traditions revealed two ironies of the French strategy. First, the French strategists demonstrated their ignorance of Algerian culture: prior to their initiatives, Algerian women did not wear the veil.<sup>8</sup> Second, while the act of unveiling was meant to represent the release of Algerian women from male oppression, French soldiers also used rapes of Algerian women to coerce obedience and acceptance of French rule by all Algerians.<sup>9</sup> After the colonial government instituted a program to lift the veils of Algerian women in 1958, Algerian women began to don their veils in defiance of the French authorities.<sup>10</sup>

Current attempts to introduce Western dress and equality measures among Muslim women have resulted in similar backlashes. Alaa, the student at the University of Nablus in the Palestinian territories, described her fight to wear the ankle-length *hijab*.<sup>11</sup> Her mother regarded the ankle-length traditional Palestinian dress as oppressive, yet many modern Palestinian women regard the veil as a political symbol. The veil for young Palestinian women represents their dedication to their people, to the Palestinian cause to oust Israel from Palestine, and to resist Western secularism.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of winning the hearts and minds of half the targeted populations in unstable areas in the world, Western attempts at liberating women from their traditional cultures have re-

peated the results seen in French-controlled Algeria. Women have turned away from Western ideals of freedom to seek justice for their oppressed peoples. As Bernard Lewis notes, "One of the most noticeable consequences of Islamic revival has been the return, by women though not men, to full traditional attire."<sup>13</sup> Further, Lewis explains, Muslims have traditionally believed "the converse of tyranny was not freedom but justice."<sup>14</sup> Terrorists have furthered this belief on the Muslim street in their calls for jihad against the spread of Western secularism and the sponsorship of Israel.

The return to traditional dress is not the only way in which Muslim women currently demonstrate their dedication to their culture, religion, and society. Increasingly, women from across the Muslim spectrum seek to join the fight against perceived Western oppression. Women from various backgrounds routinely volunteer to conduct insurgent operations in a number of states around the world. Female combatant units began to form within the Palestinian territories. In 2002, four young women conducted suicide-bombing missions against the Israeli military and civilians. These *shahida* (female martyrs) served as role models for Palestinian women who seek the return of their communities from Israeli control. In 2005, the first all-female unit formed under the military wing of Hamas, Izz al-Din Al-Qassam (derived from the name of a famous Palestinian religious leader who resisted the British rule of Palestine and founded the Palestinian Black Hand).<sup>15</sup>

The impetus for women to join the armed resistance and to sacrifice their lives for their community parallels the motivations of World War II resistance fighters, primarily to contribute to the defense and improvement of their countries while bringing honor and security to their families. The greatest difference between the resistance fighters of World War II and contemporary fighters is in their tactics: choosing to use suicide bombing as their instrument of defiance.

Likewise, recent female insurgents participate increasingly in combat operations as well as in the more traditional supporting roles. The use of women in suicide operations by conservative Islamic groups has initiated a new phase in insurgent struggles worldwide. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinians have used women to send Israelis a deadly message:

"Terrorism is not just a fringe phenomenon. Terrorists are not just strange young men whispering in dark rooms. Terrorists are high-school students, terrorists are women—and terrorists are all around you."<sup>16</sup>

### **The Modern Implications— Do Extreme Methods Indicate Different Motivations?**

Resistance seems to be motivated by defiance of perceived oppressors for reasons similar to those of the Nazi resistance fighters: personal experiences (that demand retribution) and political objectives. Religion, often cited as a primary motivation for recent terrorist activities, certainly shapes the cultures that have produced suicide bombers. While Western leaders emphasize that the war on terror is not a war against Islam waged by Christians or Jews, the reality is that religion plays an important cultural role in the motivations behind many modern terrorist and insurgent groups, and subsequently, suicide bombers.

The common assumption is that this new breed of female resistance fighter (pick an appropriate enemy: Zionist Israel, imperialist and infidel Americans, Sinhal domination, or Russian oppression to name a few) has been forced into their new role as a suicide attacker. Despite personal proclamations that these women choose this path for themselves, many in the West believe that religious or cult leaders must coerce female suicide attackers with brainwashing, drugs, rape, or blackmail and then compel them to carry out their operation.<sup>17</sup>

Russian political and military leaders claim coercion remains the primary explanation as to why so many Chechen women choose to become Black Widows in the conflict between Russia and Chechnya. Mark Francetti, British journalist and one of the few journalists to enter the besieged Moscow theater that Chechen rebels seized in 2002, disagrees with the Russian claims that rebel leaders coerce the Black Widows. Francetti suggests these women have been "brutalized by war, have lost most of their male relatives in the war either through fighting or . . . been killed by the Russians," leaving them little alternative than to take violent actions against their oppressors.<sup>18</sup> Most



of these young women thus choose to take drastic measures to affect the political or military outcome in their nation, tribe, or religious situation.

Political scientist Robert Pape theorizes that three causal factors form the main reason behind the recent increase in suicide terrorism: resistance to foreign occupation, resistance to the Western form of democracy, and religious differences between the occupied and occupying forces.<sup>19</sup> While religion played a role in the motivations of many anti-Nazi resistance fighters and continues to inspire a new generation of resistance fighters particularly in the case of Islamic fundamentalists, it is by no means the only reason, especially with regard to the importance placed on ethnicity and identity in certain cultures.<sup>20</sup>

The common thread between the motivations of modern terrorists and the resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied Europe is clear: occupation by a foreign force. Combine the desire to oust the occupying force with religious, personal, or political motivations, and the evolution of terrorist organizations often mirrors that of the evolution of anti-Nazi resistance organizations. While not acknowledged by historians or current terrorism experts, the development of female resistance fighters and the modern equivalent, female terrorists, also bears strikingly similar evolutions. While initially shunned by their male counterparts, women are increasingly becoming the best weapon; in fact, a stealth weapon, against their enemies.<sup>21</sup>

During the recent intifada by Palestinians against the Israelis, a shift in Palestinian terrorist tactics occurred. Initially terrorist and Muslim leaders rejected the use of women in suicide attacks. In 2002, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the former spiritual leader of Hamas, denounced the use of women in battle based on "reasons of modesty."<sup>22</sup> Palestinian leaders eventually changed their minds when the tactic proved to be beneficial in their struggle. Since Palestinian men, especially the young and unemployed, came under scrutiny by Israeli Defense Forces, groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah moved to use female volunteers to carry out their operations. As the violence continues to escalate in the Palestinian territories, terrorist groups are seeing an increase in their female volunteers, and even mothers are encouraging their children to martyr themselves for the Palestinian people.<sup>23</sup>

## **Honor, a Muslim Woman's Last Gift to Her Family and Community**

Although cultural restrictions placed on women are more conservative in Muslim societies, the role of women in the struggle against Israel, the United States, and their allies is evolving. In August 2001, a *fatwa* issued by the High Islamic Council of Saudi Arabia actually encouraged Palestinian women to conduct suicide operations against Israel.<sup>24</sup> Following the successful detonation of a suicide bomb by a mother (and Hamas member) that killed four Israelis and wounded seven, Yassin finally acknowledged the necessity of using female fighters as a "significant evolution in our fight."<sup>25</sup>

Even though the Koran prohibits killing one's self, female suicide bombers do not view their actions as suicide but as a means to contribute to their communities as martyrs. For women, the promise of virgins awaiting them in paradise has little meaning, but the promise of receiving Allah's glory is much greater: "Although the individual's life is given up, it is not suicide, for it is done not for self-fulfillment but to the glory of Allah. It is not suicide to know one will die in the act of defending your God, your people and your religious beliefs."<sup>26</sup> Bestowing Allah's glory onto their family and defending their religious beliefs, which are often in direct contrast to the more secular cultures of the United States and other Western nations, is a key motivator for female Muslims engaged in resistance operations.

The first female Palestinian suicide bomber, Wafa Idris, regarded suicide bombing as her only means of contributing to her community. Barren after the stillbirth of her only child, her husband divorced her since she could not bear children.<sup>27</sup> By serving as a suicide bomber, she signaled a change in terrorist tactics but not in the motivations of the female fighters. The personal experiences of the modern female terrorist mirror those of the widowed, orphaned, and childless woman of Nazi-occupied Europe who searched for ways to contribute to the community after the loss of their families.

Muslim-based groups and other terrorist organizations have thus recognized a tactic that European resistance groups capitalized upon during the Nazi occupation. This tactic exploits

the basic cultural assumption that women in general do not engage in killing, resistance, or sabotage since women are the givers of life and the nurturers of society. Western strategists, similar to the Nazi strategists coping with the resistance, continue to assume that women are not prone to violence and could not willingly endanger the lives of their children. Therefore, women terrorists are quintessential resources in the conduct of asymmetric operations against superior military forces, and terrorists groups increasingly use them in their operations.

### **Chechen Black Widows— Honor is All That Remains**

One group that has certainly exploited the tactical advantage women terrorists provide is the Chechen rebels. Most Americans, if they are aware of the conflict between Chechnya and Russia at all, assume the Chechens are simply another terrorist group motivated by a radical form of Islam. This assumption is incorrect and fails to acknowledge the key motivating factor for Chechen rebels, including the female fighters: the cultural importance of personal honor. Chechen Black Widows adhere to the “rules of *Adat*, a traditional Chechen code of honor,” which inspires them to “exact retribution for the sake of honor” against the Russian occupying presence in Chechnya.<sup>28</sup>

Chechen Black Widows have conducted numerous operations against the Russians, including the bombing of Russian airliners, the seizure of a Moscow theater, and the seizure of a school in Beslan. During the seizure of the Moscow theater, 18 out of the 41 terrorists were women; the only ones with bombs strapped to their bodies. Of all the terrorists in that theater, the female members created the greatest fear and anxiety among the victims. One of the victims, who lost her husband during the rescue attempt, said a female Chechen simply stated, “Russians did not understand the suffering” the Chechens must endure under Russian rule, and they were there (in the theater) to make sure that Russia felt the same pain.<sup>29</sup>

In 2003 Chechen rebel commander Abu al-Walid al-Ghamidi explained why women account for 60 percent of Chechen suicide bombers: “These women, particularly the wives of the mu-

jahedin who are martyred, are being threatened in their homes, their honour and everything are being threatened. They do not accept being humiliated and living under occupation.”<sup>30</sup> Just as the grief over the loss of their loved ones and the humiliation of a Nazi occupation inspired European women in World War II to resist the Fascists, Chechen women have also sought retribution against the Russians. These Chechen women are not the only women in the modern era who have suffered personal tragedies and then turned to terrorism; resistance fighters in Sri Lanka have also turned their grief and anger into weapons against their government.

### **Tamil Black Tigresses— Hindu Honor with a Nationalist Twist**

The Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) (Eelam is Tamil for Sri Lanka), the minority Hindu Tamil population in Sri Lanka, are seeking the establishment of an independent Tamil state, free from the majority Buddhist Sinhalese. The LTTE actively recruits and advocates the use of women in its operations to secure political objectives. Such action brings considerable honor to the woman and her family; Tamil society in turn reveres the Black Tigresses as saints since they are willing to die for their people. The acceptance of women in the Tamil insurgency even led to innovations in terrorist operations. The LTTE developed the first suicide belt, for example, and designed it for female use since it made the wearer look pregnant and allowed the female insurgent to pass through security checkpoints with ease.<sup>31</sup>

The LTTE proclaims the emancipation of women from traditional Hindu and Buddhist cultures to propagate the idea of freedom for all Tamils. Evidence of the LTTE’s support of equality for women goes beyond its use of women as suicide bombers. Within each branch of service of the LTTE, there are female units under the command of women.<sup>32</sup> While the motivations of female members, and more specifically, the Black Tigresses, remain primarily personally or nationalistically based, the presence of all-female units and female leadership cadres indicates a type of feminist ideology.<sup>33</sup> The LTTE male leadership exploits all of these motivations in their efforts to seek both greater sup-

port from among the populace they claim to represent and from the international forum.

When the progressive attitude of the LTTE towards women fails to generate the desired response, the LTTE has been effective at capitalizing on the personal stories of its infamous Tigresses. The LTTE goes further and accentuates supposed atrocities that befell their Tigresses to encourage public outcry against their Sinhalese oppressors.<sup>34</sup> Some detractors accuse the LTTE of fabricating tales of personal tragedies to attract greater support from among oppressed communities. Others see these incredible stories of personal tragedies as attempts to garner sympathy from external organizations.

The first female Tamil Tiger suicide bomber, later honored as a saint by the LTTE, was Thenmuli Rajaratnam, also known as Dhanu, who detonated a bomb that killed 16 bystanders during her assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. According to most sources and supported by LTTE propagandists, Dhanu's motivations for her action were rooted in her personal experience of gang rape at the hands of Indian soldiers sent by Gandhi to Sri Lanka to suppress the Tamil separatist movement.<sup>35</sup> The accepted explanation of her actions began when occupying Indian forces slaughtered her family and proceeded to rape her.<sup>36</sup> In these cultures, martyrdom for their people is seen as their only option. According to Pape, "Some of the female suicide bombers in Sri Lanka are believed to be victims of rape at the hands of the Sinhalese or Indian soldiers, a stigma that destroys her prospects for marriage and rules out procreation."<sup>37</sup> Not only does suicide bombing release a woman and her family from the stigma of rape, it provides women unable to produce children with a means to mother society. In the Tamil culture, "Tamil mothers make great sacrifices for their sons on a daily basis; feeding them before themselves or the girl children, serving them and so on. Acting as a human bomb is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother."<sup>38</sup>

The lack of marriage prospects and personal experiences of rape or loss of a husband illustrate one primary difference in motivations between women and men in regards to terrorist activities. The fact that many female terrorists are older than their male counterparts is the result of cultures that place certain expectations upon their women. When those expectations

remain unfulfilled, they must find other ways to contribute to the community.<sup>39</sup>

For many of the women of the LTTE and Chechen insurrections, personal experiences certainly influenced their decisions to become Black Tigresses or Black Widows, but nationalism also appears to elicit desires among women in their decisions to take up arms. Many female fighters among the LTTE, Chechens, and other terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, are simply resisting occupation based on nationalistic motivations.

### **Nationalism—Placing the State above Self**

During the Lebanese conflict with Israel in the early 1980s, the acts of female suicide attackers had little to do with religious ideology but centered upon the desire to oust the Israelis and enable the Lebanese people to determine their own government. In that conflict, women of varying backgrounds, including a Christian high school teacher, a Christian factory worker, and members of the Lebanese Communist Party, chose to use suicide bombings to force Israel out of southern Lebanon.

One attacker, 17-year-old Sanaa Muhaidly, explained her motivations for conducting a suicide attack in a video testimony: “I have witnessed the calamity of my people under occupation. With total calmness I shall carry out an attack of my choice hoping to kill the largest number of the Israeli army. . . . [D]o not cry for me, do not be sad for me, but be happy and smile. I am now planted in the earth of the South irrigating and quenching her with my blood and my love for her.”<sup>40</sup> While Muhaidly clearly understood her actions would not end the occupation by Israeli forces, she believed the sacrifice of her life would contribute to the eventual liberation of her country. Such actions, in combination with international political factors, did force Israel out of southern Lebanon in 2000.

Nationalism has also revealed itself among many failed Palestinian female suicide bombers. Although opinions differ on the actual inspirations behind female Palestinian nationalism, Western and Arab media outlets have glamorized the nationalist motivations proclaimed by these *shahida*. The Palestinian national leadership promoted the *shahida* actions “as evidence of

a trend towards equality insofar as Palestinian patriotism was concerned, a subject that permeated the national discourse.”<sup>41</sup>

Videotaped testimonies left behind by successful suicide bombers such as Hamas supporter Darin Abu Eisheh sustain claims by both Palestinian and militant Islamic leaders that these women volunteered to martyr themselves for Palestine. In her video statement, Eisheh proudly proclaimed “Let [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon the coward know that every Palestinian woman will give birth to an army of suicide attackers, even if he tries to kill them while still in their mother’s wombs, shooting them at the checkpoints of death.”<sup>42</sup> Eisheh further declared that the role of every Palestinian woman would “not only be confined to weeping over a son, brother, or husband; instead, she will become a martyr herself.”<sup>43</sup> Eisheh presented herself as a willing participant in militant operations, in spite of continual statements by Palestinian and militant leaders that women’s role in the jihad remained grounded in their roles as mothers and wives who support the *shahid* (male martyrs). There is recognition by these leaders, however, of the use of women for tactical operations and propaganda purposes.

The placement of women into recruiting roles in an effort to enlist female supporters provides clear evidence that Palestinian leadership acknowledges the usefulness of women in their resistance fight. The Islamic Jihad, for example, uses sayings or *hadith* attributed to the Prophet Mohammad to support their attempts to recruit women and to justify the use of women in combat operations. Jamilla Shanti, a female recruiter for the Islamic Jihad movement, claimed that women are equal to men when it comes to martyrdom. Shanti and others base this notion on a *hadith* that calls upon all Muslims to resist “if even one centimeter of Muslim soil is conquered.”<sup>44</sup>

Some Palestinian men also acknowledge the equality among male and female suicide bombers. Muatez Haimouni argues that there is “no difference between men and women as suicide terrorists.”<sup>45</sup> Haimouni not only sent women to their deaths in suicide attacks—including Andalib Taqtaqah, who killed six people in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem in 2004—but currently uses the Internet to recruit potential female combatants. Haimouni logically justifies his actions. The intense motivations of women desiring to join the fight, coupled with

the tactical difficulties Israeli security measures create, force him to use women in his operations.<sup>46</sup> The elevation of female suicide bombers to *shahida* status provides some Palestinian women with two alternatives once denied them due to gender. First, the acknowledgement that these women also want to die for Palestine and are also ardent nationalists, aside from the propaganda use, recognizes that they are equal citizens to the male *shahid*. Second, the fact that the patriarchal Palestinian society honors these women in similar fashion to the male suicide bombers culturally elevates them above their original stations in society, even if temporarily.

### Notes

1. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 33.
2. Ibid., 34.
3. Lewis, *The Middle East*, 206.
4. Ibid., 210.
5. Ibid.
6. Adler, "The Women of Hamas."
7. Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, 151.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 150.
10. Ibid., 151.
11. Adler, "The Women of Hamas."
12. Ibid.
13. Lewis, *The Middle East*, 318.
14. Ibid.
15. Adler, "The Women of Hamas."
16. Applebaum, "Girl Suicide Bombers."
17. Ling, *National Geographic*.
18. Ibid.
19. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 126.
20. Ling, *National Geographic*.
21. Ibid.
22. Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 7.
23. Ling, *National Geographic*.
24. Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 7.
25. Ibid., 8.
26. Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 18.
27. Ling, *National Geographic*.
28. Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, 150.
29. Ling, *National Geographic*.
30. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 32.
31. Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 51.



32. Gunawardena, "Female Black Tigers: A New Breed of Cat?" 81.
33. Ibid., 83.
34. Ibid., 85.
35. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 229.
36. Ibid., 230.
37. Ibid.
38. Gunawardena, "Female Black Tigers," 84.
39. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 208.
40. Ibid., 134. The "South" she refers to is southern Lebanon, which borders Israel. This is the same area where the most recent conflict between Israel and Hezbollah occurred in 2006.
41. Tzoreff, "The Palestinian *Shahida*," 22.
42. Greenberg, "Portrait of an Angry Young Arab Woman."
43. Pedahazur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 139.
44. Tzoreff, "The Palestinian *Shahida*," 22.
45. Schweitzer, "Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers," 30.
46. Ibid.

## Chapter 5

### **American Women at War**

*I've seen female officers commanding Military Police companies in some of the toughest spots in Iraq, leading a hundred men—and Iraqis, whose culture doesn't put women in such positions. Because of their pure leadership qualities, it wasn't a problem.*

—Lt Gen Ray Ordierno, US Army

Unlike the women in Nazi-occupied Europe or in the Palestinian territories, American women have not had to face the life-altering dilemma of resisting or submitting to an occupying force. The cultural myth that evolved over the role of women during World War II centered upon the glamorized depiction of Rosie the Riveter. The desire to contribute to the war effort that permeated American society led women to enter into factories in vast numbers, and American society regarded their actions as noble since they freed up more men to fight in direct combat.

### **The American Context**

After the war ended, the cultural myth suggests, women willingly returned to their prewar lives as wives and mothers. While women continued to serve in limited capacities in the military with the passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, the services actually regarded these women "as convenient temporary help until recruiting picked up again."<sup>1</sup> The legislation also capped the number of women allowed in the military at 2 percent, limited promotions, and curtailed command opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The military services went even further and prohibited those women from serving who had dependent children or discharged those who became pregnant.

As the Equal Rights Movement gained momentum in the early 1970s, restrictions on women in the military slowly began to recede. When the draft ended in 1973, the Department of

Defense (DOD) initiated manpower studies on the usefulness of women in military positions once filled by male draftees. One DOD study “concluded women were less physically capable, so laws and policies prohibiting them from serving in combat were kept in place” but also recognized they “could increase the utilization of women by 22 percent without impacting combat effectiveness.”<sup>3</sup> At the end of the draft, women made up less than 2 percent of the all-volunteer force. By 1996, the number of women in uniform increased to 13.1 percent.<sup>4</sup> As of 2007 women averaged 15.9 percent of the officer corps and 14.4 percent of the enlisted corps across the four services.<sup>5</sup>

Operation Desert Storm revealed just how critical and routine the role of women had become as well as illuminated the shortcomings of some policy mandates in the US military. First, the number of women who deployed to the area of operations (AOR) was unprecedented. About 35,000 women from all the services deployed and made up 7 percent of all US forces in the AOR.<sup>6</sup> Second, the Iraqi use of Scud missiles against support locations highlighted the lack of an identifiable battlefield: in essence, the entire AOR became the battlefield. Third, women in support roles participated in combat operations, despite the prohibitions against women in combat roles. Air-refueling tanker pilots like Col Kelly Hamilton flew within range of Iraqi air defense forces to refuel fighter aircraft, while others flew on tactical airlift missions and drove refueling tankers into Iraq to support ground operations. Fourth, women proved capable of performing under combat situations and even excelled. Finally, the American public appeared to accept the realities of women dying in combat. During Desert Storm, 11 women lost their lives, five were killed in action, and two were taken prisoner, yet there was no huge outcry from the American public.<sup>7</sup>

The ramifications of Operation Desert Storm led to several revisions to US policy regarding women in combat roles. Prior to 1991, the DOD had adopted the Combat Exclusion Policy that prohibited the assignment of women to combat and combat support units in an effort to standardize the restrictions on women in combat-related positions across the services. The performance of women and the nature of the conflict during Desert Storm forced the DOD “to reassess and revise” the policy.<sup>8</sup> Despite recommendations from a presidential commission to re-

tain the exclusion of women from combat aircraft, Congress repealed Title 10, *US Code*, § 8549 in December 1991. Newly elected president Bill Clinton supported the repeal, and in 1993 Defense Secretary Les Aspin moved “to address the remaining restrictions on the assignment of women.”<sup>9</sup>

Although women finally received the opportunity to fly combat aircraft with the repeal of Title 10, *US Code*, § 8549, the debate raged over the question of allowing women to participate in direct ground combat. The secretary allowed the individual services to define restrictions on female assignments based on a redefining of the Risk Rule that had governed policies such as § 8549. According to Aspin’s new directives, “Women could not serve in units that

- 1) engaged an enemy on the ground with weapons,
- 2) were exposed to hostile fire, and
- 3) had a high probability of direct physical contact with personnel of a hostile force.”<sup>10</sup>

The Army and Marine Corps thus chose to continue to restrict women from infantry, artillery, armor, and air cavalry units. The chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Gen John Shalikashvili, also directed that all special operations forces (SOF) aviation positions were to remain closed to women.<sup>11</sup>

As the debate continued among political leaders, American women began to enter into the fields once denied them. Many of these women demonstrated, not only to their peers and superiors but to the American public as well, their capabilities and worth in combat positions. The 1990s also led to another evolution in the conduct of military operations. The nature of US military operations transitioned from the conventional force engagements expected during the Cold War to limited wars that moved counter-insurgencies, antiterrorism, humanitarian relief, and counterdrug operations from the periphery to the center of operations.

### **The Realities of Current US Military Operations**

In the remote eastern Paktia province of Afghanistan, a roadside bomb exploded through a four-vehicle convoy of Humvees

in April 2007 and wounded five soldiers. The medic assigned to the convoy rushed to protect the wounded from insurgent gunfire “as mortars fell less than 100 yards away.”<sup>12</sup> After the convoy held off their attackers, the medic told the Associated Press, “I did not really think about anything except for getting the guys to a safer location and getting them taken care of and getting them out of there.”<sup>13</sup> The medic moved the wounded to a safer location over 500 yards away, where they received treatment on site before a helicopter evacuated them.

That Army medic, SPC Monica Lin Brown, received the Silver Star in March 2008 for her actions, yet ironically remains prohibited by Army regulations from serving in a frontline combat role. The reality of combat operations has forced the Army to ignore those regulations, since both Afghanistan and Iraq present cultural challenges where the presence of female soldiers remains necessary. In both locations, “female soldiers are often tasked to work in all-male combat units—not only for their skills but also for the culturally sensitive role of providing medical treatment for local women, as well as searching them and otherwise interacting with them.”<sup>14</sup> The restrictions remain despite the Army’s recognition that Specialist Brown’s “bravery, unselfish action and medical aid rendered under fire saved the lives of her comrades and represents the finest traditions of heroism in combat.”<sup>15</sup> The 19-year-old Brown became the second woman since World War II to receive the Silver Star, the nation’s third highest medal for valor.

Brown’s actions that resulted in her Silver Star directly contradicted the policies of her commander-in-chief, Pres. George W. Bush. In a 2005 press conference, President Bush announced that he would not authorize women to serve in ground combat units although he accepted the roles of women on combat surface ships and in aircraft.<sup>16</sup> While President Bush forbade women from serving in the infantry, artillery, armor units, and all special operations forces, he did not order women out of those combat support units and duties, such as medics, since that directive would hamper the military’s performance in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, women carried on in their support duties and continued to excel in combat environments, with the exception of Specialist Brown. Within a week of the firefight that earned her

a Silver Star, the Army chose to withdraw Brown from the field since, as Brown put it, “her presence as ‘a female in a combat arms unit’ had attracted attention.”<sup>18</sup> The Army’s reaction to pull Brown from her unit appears dubious. The same year President Bush issued his policy on women in combat, SGT Leigh Ann Hester from the Kentucky National Guard came under fire during an ambush of her unit in Iraq which eventually led to her nomination for a Silver Star.

As a member of the 617th Military Police Company, Hester’s squad was escorting a supply convoy when Iraqi insurgents attacked. During the middle of the fight, “Hester led her team through the ‘kill zone’ and into a flanking position, where she assaulted a trench line with grenades and M203 grenade-launcher rounds.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, Hester went on to clear two trenches of insurgents and killed three insurgents with her rifle. Hester did not demonstrate a sense of pride at being the first woman since World War II to win the Silver Star. Sergeant Hester simply took pride in “the duties I performed that day as a soldier.”<sup>20</sup> Hester explained that her response under fire came because of the training she received and claimed she reacted, as any soldier should; “It’s your life or theirs. . . . You’ve got a job to do—protecting yourself and your fellow comrades.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Hester was not the only woman in that particular convoy, nor the only one recognized for her actions on that day.

SPC Ashley Pullen also served as a driver in the same convoy. When the insurgents attacked, Pullen fired upon insurgents and then “exposed herself to heavy AIF [anti-Iraqi forces] fires to provide medical assistance to her critically injured comrades.”<sup>22</sup> Pullen’s actions saved several lives and resulted in her selection for the Bronze Star. The award of these medals to female soldiers highlights the realities of the current conflicts facing the United States. According to the *Washington Post*, the awarding of Hester’s Silver Star “underscores the growing role in combat of U.S. female troops in Iraq’s guerrilla war, where tens of thousands of American women have served, 36 have been killed and 285 wounded.”<sup>23</sup>

Female soldiers are not only engaged in combat on the ground. Col Laura J. Richardson commanded the 5th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment (5-101) during the first year of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). At the 2007 Air Force Women’s Train-

ing Symposium, Richardson recounted the challenges of leading others into combat. The 5-101 flew the UH-60 helicopters that transported the airborne troops of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), within the combat theater. Richardson's greatest concern was not over her own personal safety or that of her husband who commanded the 3rd Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment (3-101); it remained focused on the safety of the 305 personnel in her immediate command.<sup>24</sup> In an interview with *Time* magazine prior to the start of OIF, Richardson emphasized her anxiety over the potential use of chemical weapons by the Iraqis. Richardson explained, "There are things I can actively do to avoid or destroy an Iraqi air-defense site. There is not much I can do about a WMD [weapon of mass destruction] except sit there and take it."<sup>25</sup>

During her presentation at the Women's Training Symposium, Richardson continually stressed the importance of training in preparation for combat. By preparing her subordinates and their families for the demands of combat and demonstrating her competence as a pilot and commander, Richardson felt she earned the respect of her battalion.<sup>26</sup> In her final assessment, she believed her troops did not see her gender as a constraint to her abilities to lead the battalion into battle. She emphasized that the men and women in her battalion, along with their families, "wanted a good leader and a master of their profession."<sup>27</sup>

When the 5-101 crossed the Kuwait border into Iraq on the opening night of OIF, Richardson felt she had done her best to prepare herself and her subordinates for battle. Although this was her first time in combat, Richardson handled the challenges with ease. She bunked with her crew under her helicopter when a massive sandstorm grounded the UH-60 fleet and delayed the invasion.<sup>28</sup> She also dealt with the loss of a member of her battalion as any commander would. She focused on the morale and mental attitude of her battalion while providing comfort for grieving family members of the fallen soldier.<sup>29</sup> The challenges Richardson faced as a commander paralleled the obstacles her husband faced as the commander of the 3-101, which flies Apache helicopters.<sup>30</sup> The realities of combat compounded by harsh weather conditions and the loss of personnel can challenge anyone, regardless of gender. Colonel Richardson handled those difficulties as well as any male commander.

Richardson's experience also provides evidence of the new realities of combat in the twenty-first century. Even in supporting roles, women face the same dangers traditionally associated with direct combat roles since the "nature of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with no real front lines, has seen women soldiers take part in close-quarters combat more than previous conflicts."<sup>31</sup> The actions of Richardson, Brown, Pullen, and Hester demonstrate that women can also handle the rigors of combat situations. Their successes further contribute to the debate over the role of women in combat positions within the Army.

### **The Quiet Pioneers— Air Force Female Combat Aviators**

Unlike the women in the Army, who must enter into either the Aviation Branch or the Military Police Corps for combat opportunities, the Air Force has allowed and even encouraged women to volunteer for combat positions. Once Secretary Aspin opened assignment to combat aircraft to women in 1993, women slowly began to enter the male-dominated world of combat fighters and bombers. Beginning with then-captains Martha McSally, Jeannie Flynn, and Sharon Preszler, women who had demonstrated exceptional proficiency in undergraduate pilot training (UPT), received offers to begin initial fighter follow-on training. McSally flew the A-10 and became one of the first American female pilots to engage in combat operations and the first female commander of a fighter combat flying squadron.<sup>32</sup>

Flynn went on to earn accolades in the F-15E, including being the first woman to graduate from the USAF Fighter Weapons School, and logged 200 hours of combat time during Operation Allied Force.<sup>33</sup> Preszler piloted the F-16 and participated in no-fly-zone operations over Iraq in Operation Northern Watch. Preszler described the realities for women entering the fighter world for the first time as not being very different from that of men entering the fighter fraternity. Preszler explained, "fighter pilots care how other pilots fly. I'm going to fly and it's not going to be a big deal. It is a performance based industry."<sup>34</sup> While Preszler admitted there were some of her fellow male pilots who



did not want her there, most accepted her as an equal and judged her on her flying skills.<sup>35</sup>

Despite Air Force encouragement and recruitment efforts to coax women into fighter and bomber aircraft, the number of female combat pilots remains small. As of 2008, only 70 women fly fighter aircraft.<sup>36</sup> That number, though, has almost doubled since 2002 when only 47 women flew fighter aircraft; and still more women are flying intelligence, reconnaissance, and other strike platforms such as the AC-130.<sup>37</sup>

One female fighter pilot in this new generation is Maj Melissa “Shock” May. May flies the F-16 and recently received the Distinguished Flying Cross for a combat mission flown over Baghdad. During that mission, May and her four-ship formation took out Soviet-made mobile surface-to-air missiles to allow the Army to continue its movement into the city by enabling US air superiority.<sup>38</sup> One wingman took fire and had to drop his external fuel tanks to evade an incoming Roland missile. May described the scenario in an interview with the *Air Force Times*: “There we were, in the weather and getting shot at. And, after dropping his tanks, he [her wingman] was low on gas.”<sup>39</sup>

May and some of her peers recently created an organization dedicated to the growing sisterhood of female fighter pilots. Dubbed the Chick Fighter Pilot Association (CFPA), the group serves as point of contact for 49 active duty pilots, 16 weapons system officers (WSO), and 17 Air National Guard “fighter chicks.”<sup>40</sup> As of this writing, the informal group has expanded to include Navy and Marine Corps female fighter pilots and WSOs. The CFPA provides advice and networking to achieve three stated goals:

1. Encourage and strengthen mutual support in our unique environment,
2. Help each other succeed, and
3. Provide a professional and social network for women in fighters.<sup>41</sup>

While critics may regard this organization as divisive and evidence that women cannot endure the rigors of combat aircraft, the group proudly disagrees. CFPA seeks “not to set ourselves apart” since its members all believe that they “are, first and

foremost, Fighter Pilots,” and that serving as fighter pilots remains their primary focus.<sup>42</sup> The CFPA also remains one out of many various social and networking organizations within the fighter community including groups like the Daedalians or the Tuskegee Airmen.

Not all airborne female combatants are at the controls of fighter or bomber aircraft. Capt Allison Black, a navigator on the AC-130 gunship, has become a pioneer for women in special operations. She received the Air Force Combat Action Medal in 2007. Black was the first to receive the medal along with five male Airmen for her actions over the skies in Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>43</sup> While providing close air support for ground special operations forces and Northern Alliance partners near Kandahar, Black’s crew attacked advancing Taliban forces. During that sortie and “under large caliber, enemy antiaircraft artillery fire, Captain Black continued the assault at below minimum altitude, destroying enemy personnel and equipment, and leading to the eventual capture of Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds in Afghanistan.”<sup>44</sup>

During a panel on “Women in Combat” at the Women’s Training Symposium, Black testified that she does not feel her male squadron mates judge her by her gender but rather by her skills and professionalism in and out of the aircraft.<sup>45</sup> During Black’s first deployment to Afghanistan, she became “the first female AC-130H navigator to shoot in combat,” and through the course of events earned herself a new nickname, the “Angel of Death.”<sup>46</sup> Black, whose soft-spoken voice could be heard broadcasting over the radio, became the focus of taunting against the Taliban by Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum of the Northern Alliance. According to Black, Dostum “couldn’t believe it” and “thought it was the funniest thing” that a woman carried out the attack on Taliban forces.<sup>47</sup> Upon hearing Black’s voice over the radio, Dostum grabbed a radio to re-broadcast her voice to the Taliban radios proclaiming that, “America is so determined, they bring their women to kill the Taliban. You’re so pathetic. It’s the angel of death raining fire upon you.”<sup>48</sup> Black remains humble, despite the press accolades over her actions and her gender. She insisted, both in press articles and during her speech at the Women’s Training Symposium that she is “just another airman doing her job” and is simply proud to serve.<sup>49</sup>

MSgt Kimberly Sulipeck also feels proud for the chance to serve her country. Sulipeck, a sensor operator on the AC-130H, has over 450 combat hours over Afghanistan and estimates she has “targeted and eliminated more than 150 enemy combatants.”<sup>50</sup> Sulipeck dismisses concerns over female shortcomings during combat and urges fellow female service members to excel at any tasks assigned to them. Sulipeck advises women, and men, to “do your job and do it right.”<sup>51</sup> If everyone focuses on the mission and accepts the differences among service members, Sulipeck told the audience at the Women’s Training Symposium, the mission will succeed, and that is what matters most.<sup>52</sup> Sulipeck’s observations represent the opinions of many current US female combatants. Most women serving in the US armed forces desire the meritocracy the military usually provides its members and do not desire special treatment.

The reality of women serving in combat exists despite the best attempts of some pundits to restrict or completely deny women the opportunities to serve in combat roles. In the all-volunteer force that depends on the skills and professionalism of women, who make up nearly 15 percent of the force, military leaders across the services recognize the crucial roles women fulfill in successful mission accomplishment. Even though women have proven themselves capable of handling the rigors of various combat roles and senior military leaders acknowledge the necessity of female participation, there remains strong political opposition on the issue of women in combat.

### Notes

1. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 147.
2. Skaine, *Women at War*, 58.
3. Ibid., 59.
4. Ibid., 61.
5. Yeager, “Soldiering Ahead,” 54.
6. Skaine, *Women at War*, 64.
7. Ibid., 65–66.
8. Batters, “How the Army Can Meet the Intent of Policy,” 71.
9. Skaine, *Women at War*, 104.
10. Ibid., 106.
11. Ibid.
12. Associated Press, “Female Texas Teen to Receive Silver Star.”
13. Ibid.

14. Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star."
15. Associated Press, "Female Texas Teen to Receive Silver Star."
16. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 141.
17. Ibid.
18. Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star."
19. Wood, "Female Soldier Receives Silver Star in Iraq."
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Tyson, "Soldier Earns Silver Star."
23. Ibid.
24. Richardson, panel discussion.
25. Gibbs, "An American Family Goes to War."
26. Richardson, panel discussion.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Associated Press, "Female Texas Teen to Receive Silver Star."
32. Bergquist, "First Female Pilot in Combat Reflects on Career."
33. Grant, "The Quiet Pioneers."
34. Storey, "First Female Active-Duty Fighter Pilot Retires."
35. Ibid.
36. Weaver, "Meet the Air Force's First Female African-American Fighter Pilot."
37. Grant, "The Quiet Pioneers."
38. Winn, "Female Airmen Deadly in Iraq, Afghanistan."
39. Ibid.
40. Chick Fighter Pilot Association, "Fighterchicks.Com."
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Randolph, "Airmen Receive First AF Combat Action Medals."
44. Ibid.
45. Black, panel discussion.
46. Winn, "Female Airmen Deadly in Iraq, Afghanistan."
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Sulipeck, panel discussion.



## Chapter 6

### **The Way Backward**

*There is no question that women have valor. No question that they are as intelligent, capable, and brave as men. And yet I know of no society which has routinely treated men and women as interchangeable and equivalent units in war—the policy now being pursued by the American military.*

—Olivia Vlahos, anthropologist

Although the US military currently utilizes female soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan to gather intelligence through conversations with local women and to assist in policing female suspects, these same female soldiers are explicitly restricted from assignment to combat positions.<sup>1</sup> A 2005 proposal in the House of Representatives sought to increase restrictions on female participation in the war on terror by prohibiting women from serving in forward support companies. In a paper issued in response to the outcry over the proposed amendment, supporters stated “[t]here is no military or demographic reason, however, why America must expose young women, many of them mothers, to direct ground combat.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Realities of War and Social Politics**

The Center for Military Readiness (CMR) goes even further in its objections to women in combat. The CMR proclaims that the discussion is not just about exposing young mothers to the violence of combat but also about a gender-integrated force fighting effectively. The CMR espouses that the realities of physical capabilities, unit discipline, deployability, and unit cohesion trump calls for equal civic opportunities.<sup>3</sup> The CMR claims to support the right for women to serve but only in those jobs that do not involve direct ground combat. The CMR continuously emphasizes the common arguments made by very vocal critics of women serving in combat. Elaine Donnelly, the president of

the CMR, explains that women should “serve their country without deliberate exposure to greater, *unequal* risk,” since, Donnelly argues, “Experts in the field have noted that female captives, unlike their male counterparts, are almost always violated sexually” (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup>

In his scathing criticism of women serving in the military, *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military*, and his 1998 follow-up, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, Brian Mitchell pushes the debate beyond women serving in combat to women serving in the military altogether. Aside from the implications inherent in both titles, Mitchell’s choice of chapter titles reveals his position on the role of women in the military and combat. Titles such as “Myths in the Making,” “Damn the Services, Full Speed Ahead,” “The Last Class with Balls,” and “From Here to Maternity,” clearly indicate Mitchell’s view that women do not belong in the military, much less in combat.<sup>5</sup> He bases his conclusions on the fact that women do not adhere to the expectations of typical male combatants and uses evidence from the service academies and recent sexual assault scandals to drive home his point: “There are two kinds of cadets and midshipmen at today’s federal service academies. One is male: aggressive, strong, daring, and destined for combat; the other is female: none of the above.”<sup>6</sup>

Written in 1989, Mitchell’s *Weak Link* remains relevant in the modern debate over the role of women in combat since many of his arguments continue to reverberate, particularly with conservative Americans, evidenced in his re-release of this book in 1998 under the *Women in the Military* title. Mitchell suggests that allowing women to integrate more fully into the American military will ultimately hinder the institution’s ability to fight and win wars. Trumpeting the same arguments put forth by conservative organizations like the CMR, Mitchell also suggests that military service does not call to women the way it does to men. He claims, “Higher attrition rates, both before and after graduation, and their consistently poorer performances in history and military science prove that women at the academies simply do not want to be soldiers or sailors or airmen as much as the men do.”<sup>7</sup> Mitchell asserts that military service *calls* men whereas women see it as merely another occupation. The recent Russian experience in Chechnya seems to support this

assertion. Russian officials cite the refusal of female conscripts to deploy to combat operations in Chechnya as justification for limiting the inclusion of women into combat roles.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, at the heart of the debate over women in combat there remain three basic propositions. First, female physical capabilities, including pregnancy issues, obviously differ from men and thus affect overall unit effectiveness. Second, critics argue that the presence of women hinders unit cohesion by limiting male bonding and creating disciplinary challenges due to the sexually charged nature of coed units. Finally, many assert that a civilized society based on Judeo-Christian morality should not send its mothers and daughters into harm's way.<sup>9</sup> This final argument also uses the sex argument to suggest that captured female combatants will certainly become victims of rape or sexual brutality and therefore should avoid exposure to such risks.

### **Physical Capabilities: Women are Different**

One of the most effective arguments against women serving in combat is the simple fact that women are physically different from men. Usually smaller in stature, bone structure, and muscle development, women have traditionally been regarded as the weaker and therefore, the less aggressive of the two sexes.<sup>10</sup> The physical ability of women to carry 80-pound rucksacks on their back over a 10-mile run remains a central point to the argument against allowing women into combat positions. SPC Monica Brown, for instance, had to drag injured soldiers by their body armor with the help of fellow soldiers instead of picking them up and carrying them over her shoulder.<sup>11</sup>

Since the average female recruit, who "is about five inches shorter than the average man," has 55 to 60 percent less upper body strength, and has lighter bones more likely to fracture, the scientific evidence seems to support the theory that women have a decided disadvantage as compared to men.<sup>12</sup> In 1997, an Army research study reported that women accounted for over half of the reported cases of stress fractures in advanced training programs.<sup>13</sup> The data reinforced findings from studies done a decade earlier. According to tests completed by the Army of its 1980 West Point recruits, women possessed "only 80 per-



cent of overall strength of men,” and even after eight weeks of intensive training, men still outperformed their female counterparts.<sup>14</sup> This disparity between strength abilities provides a persuasive argument against women in combat. As Brig Gen Margaret A. Brewer, USMC, retired, suggests, “military women could appropriately be assigned to all occupational fields except the direct ground combat specialties. These specialties generally require a high degree of physical strength.”<sup>15</sup>

The critics of women in combat also disparage the concept that technological advances counteract this disadvantage. While proponents of women in combat argue that technology has mitigated the need for hand-to-hand combat with the advent of long-range artillery and aerial bombs, critics opposed to women in combat suggest technology has only increased the physical demands of combat. Mitchell suggests, “The notion that technology has alleviated the need for physical strength is almost universally accepted,” and points to a report from *Time* magazine that implied “the physical demands of the military have been exaggerated.”<sup>16</sup> The CMR also strongly disagrees with the technological solution to female physical limitations. On its Web site, the CMR argues:

Equipment and survival gear carried by today’s combat soldiers, including electronic weapons and ammunition, satellite communication devices, batteries, and water weigh 50–100 pounds—a burden that is just as heavy as loads carried by Roman legionnaires in the days of Julius Caesar. Modern body armor alone weighs 25 pounds. This weight is proportionately more difficult to carry by female soldiers who are, on average, shorter and smaller than men, with 45–50% less upper body strength and 25–30% less aerobic capacity, which is essential for endurance. Even in current non-combat training, women suffer debilitating bone stress fractures and other injuries at rates double those of men. To summarize an enormous body of well-documented evidence produced by physiologists in the U.S. and Britain, in close combat women do not have an “equal opportunity” to survive, or to help fellow soldiers survive.<sup>17</sup>

Mitchell’s assessment is even blunter as he expands his critique to include noncombat conditions. He proclaims that many daily duties remain beyond the capability of women, since “routine tasks are often too much for them,” and that some women have “trouble carrying their own tool boxes.”<sup>18</sup>

There is research data to support the declarations of Mitchell and the CMR, and critics are quick to use this evidence. Mitchell sites a Government Accounting Office (GAO) study that revealed, “62 out of 97 female aircraft mechanics could not perform required tasks such as changing aircraft tires and brakes, removing batteries and crew seats, closing drag chute doors, breaking torque on bolts, and lifting heavy stands.”<sup>19</sup> The 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces also referenced scientific studies that documented female physical disparities with their male counterparts. Specifically, the commission cited “a test of Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets using the standard Army physical fitness test,” which “found that the upper quintile of women achieved scores equivalent of the bottom quintile of men.”<sup>20</sup> The commission used other evaluations to support its recommendation to continue combat restrictions. Primarily, the commission highlighted that only a “few women can meet the male mean standard. Men below the standard can improve their scores, whereas the women who have met the standard have already achieved a maximum level beyond which they cannot improve.”<sup>21</sup>

Critics emphasize that the military services responded to the physical realities they faced in their female force by gender norming the physical fitness requirements instead of establishing an appropriate training program for female recruits. Dr. Charles Moskos, professor emeritus at Northwestern University and a member of the 1992 Presidential Commission, uses the double standards of the military services’ physical fitness tests as evidence that women do not belong in combat. Moskos references a 2002 British Ministry of Defence study that revealed under standardized fitness requirements, “injury rates for women were nine times that of men.”<sup>22</sup>

The existence of dual physical fitness standards leads to the assumption that the services must lower physical requirements to accommodate weaker females. Helena Carreiras observes that “on the one hand, when gender-specific physical tests are implemented (the most common situation in NATO countries) change associated with gender integration may be interpreted as a lowering of standards,” since a woman earns a passing grade on a performance that produces a failing grade for a man.<sup>23</sup> The double standards, according to Mitchell, also go

beyond the physical fitness tests. Mitchell suggests, "The need to accommodate smaller, weaker soldiers played a part in the Army's decision to replace the M1911 45 caliber Colt pistol with the 9 millimeter Beretta," and dismisses the likelihood that standardization of projectiles among NATO members actually drove the decision.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the 1992 Presidential Commission cited evidence that "Age also makes a difference: A 20- to 30-year-old woman has about the same aerobic capacity as a 50-year-old man. Because women begin losing bone mass at an earlier age than men, and are more susceptible to orthopedic injuries, those initially selected for the combat arms would probably not survive to career-end [*sic*]."<sup>25</sup>

Stephanie Gutmann, a critic of the integration of women into the military services, suggests a panorama of double standards exists among all the services. In her analysis, Gutmann argues that "in the chase for women and to cajole them along once they managed to bag a few, the obsequious services (less so the Marines) allowed double standards (*de facto*, *de jure*) to influence everything from recruiting, to basic training graduation, to moral conduct, to promotion qualifications. Women were allowed to come into basic training at dramatically lower fitness levels and then to climb lower walls, throw shorter distances, and carry lighter packs when they got there."<sup>26</sup> In principle, the services touted the equality of women in performing military duties. In practice, however, the services used lower standards in recruitment, training, and utilization of female service members. This clash between *de facto* (in practice ) and *de jure* (in principle) created a number of double standards in favor of women, according to Gutmann.

Other accommodations, specifically the reproductive issues and other female medical requirements, further hinder the performance of a military unit in combat. In his testimony to the commission, Moskos explained the impact of pregnancies on military units. Moskos suggested that in "mixed-gender units, particularly as it [*sic*] get[s] closer to the combat area, have lower deployment rates, higher attrition, less physical strength, more sexual activity, higher costs, et cetera, et cetera."<sup>27</sup> Most opponents use the argument that since women can get pregnant, they receive special consideration when deployments to war zones occur. Pregnancy results in the aeromedical evacua-

tion of the pregnant woman, and since it takes time to generate a replacement, the unit will have to function without one of its members. During Desert Storm, the 1st Cavalry Division reported over a period of five months there were 24 cases of pregnancy out of 1,065 women assigned.<sup>28</sup>

Pregnancies seemingly also highlight another problem with gender integration that critics readily point to as evidence women do not belong in combat units. When women and men are in close proximity to one another, various issues such as fraternization, inappropriate behavior, and in general, lax discipline arise. Gutmann highlights the results of integration on the repair ship USS *Acadia* during Desert Storm. Nearly one-tenth of the women serving onboard had to leave midcruise due to pregnancy, indicating violations of several rules, including fraternization, resulting in the remaining crew members having to make up for the lost workforce.<sup>29</sup> Many critics argue that these discipline issues can degrade unit morale and cohesion while creating an atmosphere more prone to sexual harassment and assault problems.

### **Unit Cohesion, Discipline, and a Sexually Charged Culture**

Mitchell argues that the presence of women forces a more relaxed, cultured attitude upon organizations that rely on harsh brutality and killer mentalities. There is evidence to suggest women “civilize” military culture; men serving on the integrated USS *Eisenhower* testified that they showered more and swore less with the introduction of female sailors.<sup>30</sup> Gutmann explains that the Navy’s senior leadership, when faced with demands for integration, chose to “insist that in fact a kinder, gentler soldier is just what’s needed in an era in which we are increasingly assigned as peacekeepers.”<sup>31</sup>

In his article, “Women Can’t Fight,” former Navy secretary and current Virginia Senator James Webb suggests the presence of women harms the military’s ability to conduct warfare. Webb warns, “There is a place for women in our military, but not in combat. And their presence at institutions dedicated to the preparation of men for combat command is poisoning that prepara-

tion. By attempting to sexually sterilize the Naval Academy environment in the name of equality, this country has sterilized the whole process of combat leadership training, and our military forces are doomed to suffer the consequences.”<sup>32</sup> Mitchell also emphasizes the organizational role in civilizing the once brutal and harsh military service, using the service academies as prime examples of how the integration of women irrevocably changed the institutions’ abilities to produce warrior officers. To accommodate the perception that female cadets required more privacy than their male counterparts, the academies issued shower curtains and opted not to shave the heads of female Midshipmen.<sup>33</sup> Webb quotes a classmate of his who appreciated the presence of women among the Midshipmen. Webb’s classmate believed women “brought a measure of . . . refinement to the place.”<sup>34</sup>

The Navy struggled and continues to struggle with the integration of Annapolis. Webb describes his time as a Midshipman as a test of not only his character, but also manhood. He details the rigors of his time at Annapolis and the ramifications of introducing women into this bastion of military leadership:

That was the plebe system. It was harsh and cruel. It was designed to produce a man who would be able to be an effective leader in combat, to endure prisoner-of-war camps, to fight this country’s wars with skill and tenacity. And it is all but gone. They still call it Plebe Year at the Naval Academy. Freshmen still have to memorize certain facts called “plebe rates” and still have to call the upperclass “sir.” *But there it ends. Now you cannot physically punish a plebe. You cannot unduly harass a plebe. God forbid that you should use abusive language to a plebe.* Plebes do not “brace up” in the mess hall or in the corridors of Bancroft Hall. It is now a punishment, limited to fifteen minutes maximum, to require plebes to do what they once did as a basic activity for a year: stand at attention.<sup>35</sup> (emphasis added)

Webb believed at that time that the presence of women had changed Annapolis for the worse. He argues that the integration of female Midshipmen into Annapolis has led to a “system [that] has been objectified and neutered to the point it can no longer develop or measure leadership. Internally, sexual attractions and simple differences in treatment based on sex have created resentments and taken away much of the institution’s sense of mission.” Webb even goes on to describe the

dormitory at Annapolis, Bancroft Hall, as “a horny woman’s dream,” since the vast majority of residents is male.<sup>36</sup>

Webb’s lewdness aside, the fact remains that women make up a small minority of the student population at each of the military academies. Each school faces continuing challenges in the integration of female cadets. Highlighted by Webb, the supposed underlying sexual tensions between male and female cadets, and their active duty counterparts in the military at large, have created sexually charged atmospheres. Some suggest that these atmospheres have resulted in the phenomenon of sexual assault against female cadets and active duty personnel. In a 2005 report on sexual harassment and violence at the military academies, the DOD revealed that an unusually high percentage of female cadets reported incidents of sexual harassment. Leading the other service schools, the US Military Academy at West Point had by far the highest rates of sexual harassment committed against female cadets, reported to be at 80 percent from 1993 to 1994.<sup>37</sup>

While a seemingly high number, the most common forms of harassment involved the kind of banter Webb suggested was commonplace at the academies before the integration of women. Each institution represented the friendly field of strife, destined to serve as the birthplace of successful military leaders. For West Point, the successes of Army leaders like Douglas MacArthur and Omar Bradley reflected the assumption that West Point produced tough, manly combat leaders. Thus, the introduction of women into this stronghold of masculinity inferred an attack on “West Point’s mystique.”<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, senior leadership initially failed to address these cultural paradigms before allowing women to enter the academies. The resulting reactions to accusations of sexual misconduct within DOD led senior leaders to deem any “verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” that creates “an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment,” as sexual harassment.<sup>39</sup> The very atmosphere described by Webb as pivotal in his development as a Marine Corps leader thus equated to sexual harassment. This represented a failure of military leadership to “separate the defense of a masculine institution from the defense of traditionally male activities and attitudes that were ugly and sometimes criminal.”<sup>40</sup> Defined as “sexual

harassment,” the complaints from 1993 to 1994 at West Point for the most part involved “derogatory personal comments and comments that standards were lowered for women.”<sup>41</sup> These comments reflect the underlying culture present at each institution while revealing the difficulties faced by and, to some extent, the failures of senior leadership in dealing with these complex challenges.

Mitchell also points to similar challenges that the US Air Force Academy (USAFA) had in 1976 integrating women into the school. Instead of the unsympathetic discipline male recruits routinely received, academy officials observed that women responded better to positive motivation and created “several special measures to protect women from the worst of cadet life.”<sup>42</sup> Webb and Mitchell both argue these organizational changes weakened the effectiveness of producing combat leaders since the measures often abandoned the aggressive, in-your-face behaviors evident in the military prior to gender integration.

Some argue this approach still permeates Air Force Academy culture. Following the 2003 sexual assault scandal that rocked the institution, a scandal that allows critics to demonstrate the efficacy of their arguments, academy leadership implemented the “Agenda for Change.” Changes included the controversial removal of the “Bring Me Men . . .” sign, segregated classes on sexual assault, and mandatory training for faculty on what to do if a cadet admitted to committing or was the victim of sexual assault. The Air Force chief of staff also replaced the top four officers in command during the scandal and chose a woman, Col Debra Gray, as a vice commandant of cadets. Her primary responsibility was to oversee the implementation of the “Agenda for Change.”

The most controversial measure implemented actually provided amnesty for other infractions to anyone who reported or witnessed a sexual assault. The “Agenda for Change” stated:

In all reported cases of sexual assault, amnesty from Academy discipline arising in connection with the alleged offense will be extended to all cadets involved with the exception of the alleged assailant, any cadet involved in covering up the incident, any cadet involved in hindering the reporting or investigation of the incident, and the senior ranking cadet in attendance. The senior ranking cadet present will be responsible and accountable for all infractions committed by junior cadets.<sup>43</sup>

This policy created the perception that female cadets could drink, behave inappropriately, and avoid disciplinary action if they merely *accused* someone of sexual assault. It further led to the belief that female cadets received defferential treatment based on their gender. That belief also extended to female officers.

Gray, a member of the first gender-integrated USAFA class, oversaw the academy's "sexual climate issues" and remained the primary officer in charge of implementing the "Agenda for Change."<sup>44</sup> Gray's selection created some controversy when one male cadet sent an e-mail to the chief of staff, Gen John P. Jumper, that Gray's only "qualifications is [sic] that she is female, and an Academy graduate."<sup>45</sup> The belief that Gray received her new position based on gender and not her professional qualifications illuminated the residual problems of integrating women into the military services.

In order to integrate women, the services had to adapt their assignment processes to include consideration for married military couples, establish systems to support dependent family members, update physical fitness requirements, and institute formalized education programs on sexual harassment and assault. Furthermore, when Secretary Aspin lifted the ban on women flying combat aircraft, the Air Force used aggressive tactics to encourage women to move to fighter cockpits. The primary means to recruit women into fighters involved designating fighter aircraft assignments out of UPT for women only. While there was no formal backlash to the policy, the Air Force eventually removed the designations. The service also no longer assigns an action officer to track "female pilot" issues, a practice common during the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> The damage had been done, however, as the stigma attached to affirmative action-type policies began to permeate the services. An e-mail from an 18-year-old cadet to the Chief of Staff in 2003 reveals the reality that sexism is still present in the military services, despite the best attempts of the services to educate its members on sexual assault and harassment.

Although the services have declared zero-tolerance policies for sexual harassment since the early 1980s, cases such as the USAFA sex assault scandal, the Tailhook scandal, and the sexual assault scandal at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, demonstrate that "such a goal is far from reality."<sup>47</sup> Despite policy



declarations, the military has failed to eradicate this behavior and has focused on the symptoms instead of the causation of sexual assault, which has created a significant dilemma for the services.<sup>48</sup> In an attempt to eradicate this illicit behavior, the military chose to train and educate its members about sexual harassment in the workplace through a series of equal opportunity training classes.

Also known as “sensitivity training,” the classes were the object of ridicule and resentment reminiscent of the race-based sensitivity training conducted during the racial integration effort of the early Cold War. The classes emasculated the male members and isolated the female members further despite instructors’ best attempts to make scenarios gender neutral. The overriding lesson was men always needed to behave as they would around their wives or mothers; if your wife or mother would be offended, do not say or perform the intended action. It became a zero-sum contest between the macho locker room of Wellington’s “fields of friendly strife” and the family dinner table.

One Navy officer best described the sentiment of those who chafed under the services’ attempts to thwart sexual harassment and assault. A lieutenant commander EA-6B Prowler pilot explained in 1998 that “They’re [senior leadership] trying to legislate how we think and act and trying to change something that men have done for centuries. It’s going to take a long time for society to change. There’s nothing wrong with trying to be a New Age Sensitive Guy. You can do that, but there’re also times when you just wanta [sic] be with the boys, go out drinking and have a good time and act like pigs.”<sup>49</sup>

Mitchell suggests that the central problem to situations such as this rests on “the natures of men and masculinity.”<sup>50</sup> Men think and act in a very different way than women. Attempts to educate and train men on how to behave around women, critics argue, diminishes their more aggressive nature and inhibits their baser impulses, like violence and angry reactions to failure or threats. A set of constant truths, Mitchell posits, lies in the

importance of the military’s masculine character in attracting men. In all societies, it is necessary for young males to do things that establish their identity as men. In our own society, the proof of manhood often takes frivolous and destructive forms: restless young men devote themselves fanatically to sports, rock music, or crime. In healthier societies,

the proof is more constructive. Young men can be persuaded to endure years of dirt, danger, and drudgery in occupations whose only attraction is their manly character. Military service has always been considered the most manly of roles and therefore always been able to attract recruits, despite its abundance of detractions.<sup>51</sup>

The failure to eradicate sexual scandals therefore is not due to a lack of education; the recent sexual scandals merely highlight the serious problems associated with introducing women into organizations built upon decades or even centuries of a masculine heritage.

The tendency, some analysts suggest, for sexual assault to occur in gender-integrated organizations “may be seen as the effect of pressures to reassert the masculinity of service members,” especially as women continue to prove their abilities in operations other than combat, like peacekeeping or humanitarian interventions.<sup>52</sup> Webb provides one explanation for the causes of sexual assault and rape. The fundamental difference between men and women remains the fact that “Man must be more aggressive to perpetuate the human race. Women don’t rape men, and it has nothing to do, obviously, with socially induced differences.”<sup>53</sup>

Webb expands this argument even further and suggests that with women integrated into combat units, the focus drifts from combat to procreation, which leads to disciplinary issues and a reduction in combat effectiveness. Webb assesses that “Introducing women into combat units would greatly confuse an already confusing environment and would lessen the aggressive tendencies of the units, as many aggressions would be directed inward, toward sex.”<sup>54</sup> And while the issues surrounding sexual harassment remain politically charged and garner greater press coverage, the moral question about women serving in combat remains the most controversial and provocative argument against the notion of women in military service.

### **The Moral and Cultural Issue— Sending Mothers and Daughters into Battle**

At the heart of the debate of allowing women into combat rests the question of the role of women in society in general. The traditional perception, still held by many men and women

of all cultures, of the role of women has been one of nurturer, life giver, and mother. During the suffrage movement, American women demanded civic equality and the right to participate in the public forum by casting their own votes. Critics of the Suffragists suggested women already had a prominent position in society and “that in their role as mothers they were performing a public service: that the women who died in childbirth were sacrificing their lives as much as men who died in battle.”<sup>55</sup>

The association between motherhood and citizenship dates back to Spartan society. The only way to assure glory in the afterlife for Spartan citizens was for men to die in battle or women to die in childbirth.<sup>56</sup> This cultural association between motherhood and political status created “a troubling legacy; women and men have been incorporated into citizenship in different ways: men primarily as soldiers and workers and women primarily as mothers.”<sup>57</sup> Erin Solaro, author of *Women in the Line of Fire*, suggests maternal mortality played (and still plays) a significant role in the establishment of these gender norms for citizenship. She argues that even in modern American society, the maternal mortality rates are “high enough to account for the very strong emotional reaction many people have against women serving in combat.”<sup>58</sup>

Civil society reinforced (and continues to reinforce) this emotional reaction. Western societies adopted a Victorian perception that through motherhood, women remained morally superior since they gave life instead of taking it.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, even as the modern era has witnessed women entering the workforce en masse, the role of women in child rearing and home-making still often defines their contributions to society. After an intense study on the implications and integration of women into Western democratic militaries, Prof. Helena Carreiras concluded that two main aspects underline the cultural exception to women in combat: “first, the persistence of a shared cognitive model that supports gender asymmetries; second, the disproportionate share of work and family responsibilities between men and women.”<sup>60</sup>

The CMR suggests the most fundamental reason for limiting female participation in combat remains the cultural notion that violence against women is unacceptable. In an explanation of the organization’s support of the Hunter/McHugh Amendment

to the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act, the CMR argued, "Cultural values also matter. Assigning female soldiers to close combat units *would be tantamount to acceptance of deliberate violence against women*, as long as it occurs at the hands of the enemy" (emphasis added).<sup>61</sup> In his article on the subject, Webb also pointed to the cultural ramifications of a society encouraging its women into combat roles. He highlighted that "This is the only country in the world where women are being pushed toward the battlefield. The United States also has one of the most alarming rates of male-on-female violence in the world: Rapes increased 230 percent from 1967 to 1977 and the much-publicized wife-beating problem cuts across socioeconomic lines."<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the patriarchal Western culture has evolved in such a way that it assumes women require protection because of their physical inferiority and because women create life in the continuance of the society and remain vulnerable to maternal mortality.

Maternal mortality remains a constant risk in even the most medically advanced societies and, therefore, creates the notion that men need to protect women from all other harm since they face death with each pregnancy. According to political essayist Erin Solaro, men seek "to redeem a blood debt with blood" on the battlefield.<sup>63</sup> If societies allowed women to participate fully in combat that perceived societal balance of sacrifice would tilt. Societal acceptance of women in combat, critics argue, would lead to further problems within that society as barriers between men and women diminish.

In fact, a major argument used by Representative Duncan Hunter in debates over the inclusion of women in combat support units focused on the cultural dilemma of a nation sending its mothers and daughters to war. Just prior to the debate over his amendment, Hunter declared, "The nation should not put women into the front lines of combat. In my judgment, we will cross that line soon unless we make a policy decision. Forward support companies go forward into battle. That is why they are labeled 'forward' support companies. The American people have never wanted to have women in combat, and this [amendment] reaffirms that policy."<sup>64</sup>

An example of the disparities between the societal expectations of men and women exists in the press coverage of combat

deployments and combat fatalities. During the initial deployments for Desert Storm, OEF, and OIF, frequent reports focused on the mothers leaving their children behind. The concern over mothers having to deploy created such a political frenzy that Congress spent a number of hours debating legislation “such as the ‘Gulf War Orphans Act’ to keep parents out of combat zones.”<sup>65</sup> The focus remained primarily on the mothers who left their children behind and not the fathers. The emphasis on mothers deploying and potentially dying provided critics of women in combat and in the military another argument in their favor.

This cultural concept is not exclusive to America. As noted previously, even though Soviet women proved their abilities to fight in combat in a variety of roles, they only did so because of the threat against the Soviet Union. These Soviet women firmly believed that women performing activities traditionally reserved for men represented an aberration created solely by the Nazi invasion, and civil society should not willingly send its women into combat.<sup>66</sup> Carreiras’ research 50 years later exposes a similar cultural stigma attached to the thought of women serving in the military and in combat. She suggests, “Most women share with men the dominant and asymmetric cultural model of gender relations,” which results in the institutionalizing of cultural norms within military organizations and society as a whole.<sup>67</sup>

This sentiment persists today in most nations around the world and accounts for the small numbers of women in the military services. Carreiras concludes that the “cultural resistance to women’s presence is among the factors that are pushing women away from the military” and further preclude women from engaging in combat operations.<sup>68</sup> Carreiras’ research reveals the patriarchal undertones that discourage female involvement in combat. The attempts at integration in the Dutch military service, Carreiras suggests, exemplify the strong cultural influences that actually discourage women from entering into the military, much less combat.<sup>69</sup>

Even during the American debate over allowing women into fighter aircraft in 1991, then-chief of staff of the Air Force, Gen Merrill A. McPeak, admitted his own personal biases in testimony to the Senate Armed Service Committee about women in combat aircraft. McPeak explained that despite logical evidence

proving female capabilities, "I have a very traditional attitude about wives and mothers and daughters being ordered to kill people," and that he would choose a male pilot over a female pilot when going into combat.<sup>70</sup>

Critics of women in combat suggest that the real motivation behind the push for opening combat to women remains hidden behind feminist agendas. The question is not about civic equality, as Anita Blair suggests, but about "conquering manhood."<sup>71</sup> Gutmann also dismisses the argument put forth by feminists suggesting women deserve the same civic right to die for their country as men. Instead, Gutmann argues, the proponents of women in combat want women "to bask in the special glory and adoration that comes to soldiers returning from or marching off to war."<sup>72</sup> If the integration process hinders the military's ability to conduct war, critics argue, antimilitary feminists would doubly rejoice.

Some in favor of opening combat positions actually argue that enlightenment does occur when women enter into organizations such as the political and military branches, which could result in fewer wars in the long term. Gutmann references comments made by Betty Friedan to illustrate this position. Friedan claims she

feels safer somehow because these powerful nuclear weapons that can destroy the world and the new human strategies therefore needed to defend this nation will hence forward be in the hands of women and men who are, with agony, breaking through to a new strength, strong enough to be sensitive and tender to the evolving needs and values of human life—if only the last gasps of threatened machismo do not stop this evolution.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, the enlightening or feminization of a military organization diminishes the aggressive, masculine elements traditionally associated with military units which naturally inhibits the violent tendencies of its members. Mitchell also believes that in a version of this feminist enlightenment. He writes that a "Progressive society prides itself with having evolved to a higher level where ancient impulses are deplored as childish *machismo* and where most socially respectable motivations are, ironically, the most material and most selfish" (emphasis in original).<sup>74</sup>

The debate over the role of women in combat in the US military continues to occur. While critics, like Webb, appear to ac-

cept the equality of women in other professions such as the medical, legal, and political career fields, there remains a vocal chorus of detractors on the issue of women in combat. While the country accepts the potentiality of having a female commander in chief, many still believe women do not belong in combat or even in the military.

Senator Webb, however, provides an interesting indicator of how this debate is potentially evolving in light of current operational demands. Webb appears to have reconsidered his opposition to women in combat. During the 2006 senate race, Webb apologized if his 1979 article on women in the military offended readers and stated he had changed his opinion on the issue of women in combat. Perhaps Webb's conversion evolved out of political necessity. He has sought the support of the more liberal Democratic Party since writing a similar article in 1997 about the attack on the masculine military culture.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, perhaps Webb recognized the successful contributions of American female combatants since 1997 and now truly believes women can contribute equally to the defense of the United States.

### **Are the Arguments Valid?**

These three arguments have remained and continue to remain central to the debate put forth by critics of women in combat and military service. In spite of 30 years of evidence of the successful integration of women into combat units and their sustained exceptional performance, critics continue to use these three fundamental arguments to implore a return to a more *civilized* method of national defense built upon an all-male military. Regardless of the evidence contradicting their arguments, critics continue to repeat them.

Mitchell, for example, published another book on the subject in 1998 entitled *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, where he essentially republished his 1989 book, *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military*. The only major differences between Mitchell's two works was his inclusion of the 1992 Presidential Commission (which he referred to as "The War Games Commission") the Navy Tailhook scandal, the controversies over former Air Force 1st Lt Kelly Flinn, the death of

Navy LT Kara Hultgreen, and the Aberdeen Proving Ground sexual assault scandal.<sup>76</sup> Mitchell also presented his arguments before the 1992 Presidential Commission, citing his analysis of purported evidence of the impact women had on military institutions, like the service academies. Interestingly, Mitchell either ignored or remained ignorant to scientific studies and cases of successful combat unit integrations that occurred between the publications of his two books.

Most notably absent from his follow-up analysis of the debate is the 1997 study by the US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine. The study examined how female soldiers responded to physical fitness regimens focused on improving their abilities to perform specified tasks associated with their assigned duties, such as heavy lifting and long-distance marches with 75-pound backpacks.<sup>77</sup> While following the prescribed Army time constraints for physical fitness programs, the study revealed appropriate training vastly improved the female soldiers' physical performances. The training regimens, which replicated the actual work the women would do instead of focusing on the typical push-ups, sit-ups, and long-distance running programs, revealed that 78 percent of the female participants could meet the Army's minimum requirements for "very heavy" Army jobs, up from the prestudy level of 24 percent.<sup>78</sup>

The results of the study suggest that with proper training, women can perform physically demanding duties despite their perceived physical inferiority. Furthermore, the women's physical sizes can provide benefits that exceed that of their male counterparts. For example, the smaller bone structure of a female mechanic enables her to reach areas within an aircraft engine that an average man cannot reach.<sup>79</sup> Women are also not the only military members hampered by their smaller stature.

During the last two weeks of his Marine Corps basic training, Daniel Motamedi had to figure out how to lift the three heaviest platoon members and their body armor onto improvised stretchers.<sup>80</sup> While on a hike up a mountain in full combat gear, Motamedi also had to decide whether to help a weaker platoon mate. Although restricted from assisting weaker platoon members during the hike, "Motamedi told him [his friend] to hang on to his pack, and he dragged his friend along."<sup>81</sup> The military encourages, values, and lauds effective teamwork. Motamedi's



actions adhered to the Marine Corps standard to leave no one behind, yet what would the response have been had the friend in need been a woman? Col Lorry Fenner, USAF, suggests that the past socialization of men “prepared them to recognize an individual woman’s need for assistance as a particular instance of women’s general weakness but did not allow them to draw a similar conclusion with regard to individual men whose comrades (including, sometimes, women) helped them carry a load when they otherwise would have fallen behind.”<sup>82</sup>

If Mitchell had included the results of the 1997 study in his recent book, he most likely would have highlighted the fact that the study revealed female participants could still only lift 81 percent of the weight lifted by their male counterparts.<sup>83</sup> Yet this argument would have not sufficed since the majority of female participants *met Army standards* for those “very heavy” jobs without regard to gender. The study provides evidence that with appropriate physical training, most individuals are capable of performing assigned tasks.

It also highlights an important aspect in regards to military readiness, the gender issue aside. Traditionally, prescribed physical standards for military jobs have had little to do with the actual job at hand.<sup>84</sup> A perfect example is the obstacle course present at most military installations. While most military jobs do not require a service member to jump up and over a wall, an obstacle of this type remains a common element of the military obstacle courses of all the services. While women and men both struggle to overcome this kind of an obstacle if they do not have the upper body strength required to pull one’s body over the wall, critics of women in the military and combat “pointed at women’s failure with the wall as a sign of general incapacity or weakness.”<sup>85</sup>

Both those for and against the inclusion of women into combat and the military have likewise overlooked a recent shift in American cultural norms as they pertain to female participation in sports. The advent of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 essentially forced high school and college athletic programs to offer women the opportunity to participate in sports. Women participate in physical fitness programs at earlier ages. There appear to be no official studies regarding the impact of Title IX on current female military recruits and their

physical capabilities. However, as more young women expose themselves to physically demanding sports like soccer, boxing, wrestling, martial arts, and weight lifting, the argument that women are physically less capable than men may potentially diminish. If the military services adopted a capabilities-based selection process for duty assignments, the physical fitness arguments would become moot. The services would fill their duty positions with the most qualified persons, regardless of gender.

Respecting the other two arguments opponents of women in combat and the military readily point to, there remains even less documentary evidence disproving their suppositions. Nevertheless, the impact of women on unit cohesion and discipline clearly lies within the responsibility of unit leadership, whether it be at the squad or at the cabinet level. Prior to the integration of women into the military, unit cohesion and the good order and discipline of a unit certainly were leadership challenges.<sup>86</sup> Military leaders at all levels had to make concerted efforts to sustain morale and enforce discipline, and yet incidents still occurred in all-male units that revealed breakdowns in unit cohesion and discipline. At the height of the conflict in Vietnam, "Bounties as high as \$10,000 were sometimes offered by disgruntled troops for the murder of an overaggressive officer fighting a war no one believed in any longer."<sup>87</sup> Known as "fragg-ing," these incidents highlight the continuous challenge military leaders face. At the same time incidents of fragging were increasing, military leaders also faced black servicemen who had become "increasingly militant in their opposition to institutional racism in the Army, especially those who had been energized by the civil rights movement."<sup>88</sup> Military leadership has always faced the challenges of creating cohesiveness and maintaining discipline, regardless of the gender makeup of the organization.

The challenges to all military leaders remain constant: motivation, discipline, unit cohesion, and mission effectiveness. Moreover, there simply has not been any extensive research on the links between combat effectiveness and unit cohesion, and proponents of gender inclusion policies "assert that the relevance of cohesion for combat effectiveness has never been proven."<sup>89</sup>

The arguments made by the CMR, Mitchell, Guttman, Webb, and echoed by some members of the 1992 Presidential Commission imply that the underlying reasons the government

must continue to exclude women from combat positions and even the military in general remains the societal implications of allowing women into combat roles. Each critic suggests that the assignment of women to combat roles tears at the fabric of American culture and will eventually lead to the demise of American military forces.

Therefore, the heart of the debate for these critics rests on the notion that it is immoral for the nation's political leaders to allow and condone organized violence against the female segment of the population. This argument also appears difficult to prove since it derives from subjective views on morality. On the one hand, it is acceptable to allow women to serve in traditional female roles in the military since they are not directly involved in violence. Mitchell stated in his testimony to the 1992 Presidential Commission that "Women are desperately needed as military doctors and nurses, for the very reason that the military cannot get enough doctors and nurses, male or female, as it is."<sup>90</sup> As long as women remain protected from organized violence, social values remain intact. As Webb implied in 1979 and the CMR currently suggests, allowing women to serve in the military condones and even encourages violence perpetrated against them.

On the other hand, Mitchell argues that the reduction of forces during the 1990s eliminated the need for female service in the military. Mitchell summarizes that "with a military that is a full 30 percent smaller than it was ten years ago (down from 2.1 million members in 1988 to 1.5 million members at the end of 1996), no one can seriously argue that the military must recruit women to make up for a lack of men."<sup>91</sup> Recent military operations certainly contradict Mitchell's assessment. In a RAND study on the assignment of Army women during recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, personnel in the field testified, "there were simply not enough personnel to do the job without women."<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, none of the critics address whether it is socially acceptable and noble for men to engage in organized violence against other men. Each opponent to the inclusion of women in combat and the military in general implies that violence perpetuated by men against other men remains an acceptable societal norm. Their arguments essentially break down into two simple explanations: (1) it is acceptable for men to en-

gage in violence against other men but not for women to engage in or become victims of violence, and (2) society values its female members more since they deserve protection from violence.

Again, this aspect of their argument appears untenable. From a different perspective, it appears that American society places the safety of its female citizens above the safety of its male citizens and thus discriminates against its male members. Moreover, a closer examination of the arguments put forth by opponents of women reveal a lack of respect for half of the American population. Mitchell, Guttman, and Webb suggest men serving in the military need to behave inappropriately to bond, develop their violent tendencies, and become effective combatants. They further imply that men cannot control their impulses when women are present in close proximity or under stressful situations, with the exception of the medical career field as noted by Mitchell. Their arguments dismiss the professionalism possessed by a majority of the men serving in the American military who treat women and other men with dignity and respect. Their arguments instead paint a picture of a past US military as an institution rife with lewd and violent members who did not reflect the standards of their society, and these critics suggest the military needs to return to those by-gone days of male dominance.

If Mitchell's argument holds and civilian leadership removes the women currently comprising 15 percent of the Army, would combat effectiveness diminish? Moreover, what would tear the fabric of American society greater: full inclusion of women into the military based on physical capabilities or revocation of the laws that have allowed women to serve in the American military for almost a generation? Finally, has the integration of women into combat roles truly impeded combat effectiveness? The final assessment remains unclear; however, women have thus far proven formidable combatants whether participating in official or unofficial capacities.

### Notes

1. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 16.
2. Despite objections from senior Army leadership and female service members, the legislation forced the Army to renew its commitment to ban

women from ground combat roles, such as the infantry and field artillery. Center for Military Readiness (CMR). "CMR Policy Analysis."

3. CMR, "Women in Combat."
4. Donnelly, "Private Lynch and Amazon Myths."
5. Mitchell, *Weak Link*.
6. Ibid., 86.
7. Ibid., 83.
8. Felgenhauer, "Russian Military."
9. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 89.
10. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 242.
11. Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star."
12. Gutmann, *Kinder, Gentler Military*, 247.
13. Ibid., 256.
14. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 157.
15. Skaine, *Women at War*, 174.
16. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 156.
17. CMR, "Women in Combat."
18. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 157.
19. Ibid.
20. CMR, "Women in Land Combat."
21. Ibid.
22. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 272.
23. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 90.
24. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 161.
25. CMR, "Women in Land Combat."
26. Gutmann, *Kinder, Gentler Military*, 15.
27. Presidential Commission, "Alternative Views."
28. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 274.
29. Gutmann, *Kinder, Gentler Military*, 155.
30. Ibid., 271.
31. Ibid.
32. Webb, "Women Can't Fight."
33. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 70.
34. Webb, "Women Can't Fight."
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Department of Defense, "Report of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment," 3.
38. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 205.
39. Department of Defense, "Report of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment," 1.
40. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 221.
41. Department of Defense, "Report of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment," 3.
42. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 48.
43. Public Affairs, "United States Air Force Academy: Agenda for Change."
44. Mientka, "Congress Criticizes Investigation."

45. Snopes.com, "Space Cadet."
46. Grant, "The Quiet Pioneers."
47. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 54. The Tailhook Association is a group for naval aviators similar to the Daedalians for all military aviators. The Tailhook Convention in Las Vegas in 1991 was notorious for lewd conduct, and several claims of sexual harassment and assault by female military and civilian participants led to a major investigation by the Navy inspector general. For more information on this particular scandal, consult *Frontline: Tailhook '91*. For information on the Aberdeen Proving Grounds scandal, in which supervisors abused their authority to gain sexual favors from trainees, see CNN, "Three Soldiers Arraigned."
48. Devilbiss, *Women and Military Service*.
49. Gutmann, *Kinder, Gentler Military*, 105.
50. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 217.
51. Ibid.
52. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 54.
53. Webb, "Women Can't Fight."
54. Ibid.
55. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 66.
56. Elshtain, *Women and War*, 169.
57. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*.
58. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 134.
59. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 70.
60. Ibid., 206.
61. CMR, "Women in Combat."
62. Webb, "Women Can't Fight."
63. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 140.
64. Bender, "Combat Support Ban Weighed on Women."
65. Gutmann, *The Kinder, Gentler Military*, 135.
66. Elshtain, *Women and War*, 178.
67. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 207.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Sagawa and Campbell, "Women in the Military," 3.
71. Gutmann, *The Kinder, Gentler Military*, 152.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., 151.
74. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 185.
75. Webb, "War on Military Culture."
76. 1st Lt Kelly Flinn was the first female B-52 pilot and created a controversy over her affair with an enlisted woman's husband. For more information, see *New York Times*, "Times Topics." LT Kara Hultgreen, who attended the 1991 Tailhook Convention, was the first female F-14 pilot in the Navy. She died in an aircraft accident while on final approach to an aircraft carrier when she lost one engine. During the mishap inspection, questions about her capabilities and training surfaced, causing a scandal about the use of women in combat aviation. For more information on LT Hultgreen, see Manegold,

"Lives Well Lived." In 1996, the Aberdeen Proving Grounds had a series of sexual harassments, assaults, and incidents of rape, which led to the convictions of several Army NCOs and officers. See CNN, "Three Soldiers Arraigned."

77. Harman et al., "Effects of a Specifically Designed Physical Conditioning Program," ix.

78. Ibid., 1.

79. Fenner and deYoung, *Women in Combat*, 10.

80. Zucchini, "Grueling March."

81. Ibid.

82. Fenner and deYoung, *Women in Combat*, 9.

83. Harman et al., "Effects of a Specifically Designed Physical Conditioning Program," 1.

84. Fenner and deYoung, *Women in Combat*, 7.

85. Ibid., 8.

86. Miller and Williams, *Do Military Policies on Gender and Sexuality Undermine Combat Effectiveness*, 389.

87. Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers*, 121.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid., 3.

90. Mitchell, *Women in the Military*, 350.

91. Ibid., 349.

92. Harrell et al., *Assessing the Assignment Policy*, 54.

## Chapter 7

### **The Way Forward**

*The only civilization the United States should cherish is nothing less than that which men and women create together, intellectually and physically, and together defend, as equals in public and private.*

—Erin Solaro

It has been evident since the Gulf War that without women serving in a variety of roles, units would struggle or even fail at their assigned missions. Military leadership recognizes that the “United States can no longer fight a major war or campaign without women.”<sup>1</sup> Detractors counter that this reliance on women in critical roles is the direct result of the military services actively choosing to assign women to those roles. The resulting question is how should the military employ the women who enlist or earn their commissions?

### **The Realities of the All-Volunteer Force in a Global War on Terror**

The opponents of women in combat fail to acknowledge the role women have played and continue to play in the conduct of war. Instead of relegating women to support roles, current US military leadership seeks to arm them, train them to fight, and allow them the same privilege given to every man in this country as a birthright. Although initially the military required prodding by civilian leadership to integrate women, the results have shaped the assessment of the current military senior leadership on the efficacy of female service members. American women have proven their capabilities in a number of combat roles and directly contributed to successes in operations in Kuwait, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

This chapter examines three common arguments for opening all combat positions to women and applies these arguments to the case studies presented above. The first argument in favor of



allowing women derives from the demands and realities of the all-volunteer force (AVF) fighting the GWOT and performing humanitarian missions simultaneously. The second argument proposes a capability-based selection process for all military occupations regardless of gender. Finally, the third argument addresses the civic equality issues inherent to this discussion, including an American woman's right to serve, kill, and die for her country, as well as be subject to the draft as is required of most American males between the ages of 18 and 25.<sup>2</sup>

### **The AVF—Limitations and Strengths**

In 1973, Congress decided to end the draft and institute the AVF. Pres. Richard Nixon established the Gates Commission in 1969 to "explore the feasibility of an all-volunteer force as an alternative to the draft," but not to create the impetus to force gender integration as critics of women in the military have suggested.<sup>3</sup> The political desire to find alternatives to the draft drove the initial considerations for creating the AVF. The ramifications of an unpopular war and the "obvious unfairness of the Selective Service System," led to the realization "that middle-class white men were not going to join in large enough numbers," to sustain a "Cold War strategy of Flexible Response."<sup>4</sup> Opponents and proponents for women in the military and combat cite that decision as the turning point for gender integration of the military services. The military faced morale and retention problems, a constant Soviet threat around the world, and a lack of desirable recruits. In addition, the military had provided civilian leadership with previous opportunities to impart social evolutions such as the integration of racial minorities. Gutmann suggests that these contextual circumstances in the 1970s and others, including an anti-Vietnam War counter-culture that promoted drug use, draft dodging, and disgust for anything military, forced civilian leaders and the armed services to target women to fill recruiting quotas.<sup>5</sup> While the creation of the AVF certainly increased opportunities for American women, it created a number of challenges for senior military leaders raised in all-male organizations.

According to Carreiras, "the armed forces are Janus-faced organizations: on the one hand, they have to assure military

effectiveness to respond to the changes of the strategic context; on the other, especially in democracies, they must be responsive to wider social values and thus to the society in which they are embedded and which pays for them.”<sup>6</sup> As the cries amongst the feminist movement grew louder in the mid-1970s, civilian leaders once again looked to the struggling armed services for opportunities to promote gender equality. Mitchell argues that the feminist agenda was and remains the primary justification for the integration of women into the armed forces. He suggests, “The AVF was never allowed to work without women. At the start, its architects resorted to greater use of women without considering the possibility that an all-male military, with its distinctly masculine appeal, might attract more young men than a more feminine force.”<sup>7</sup>

Those who favor gender integration of the armed forces disagree with Mitchell’s line of argument. Even during the early years of a gender integrated military, proponents argued that women provided the military with “a higher-quality recruit,” since they “tended to score higher on the academic tests given by recruiting stations; they tend not to get roaring drunk and start fights; they’re generally more dutiful.”<sup>8</sup> Even Mitchell agrees that women are superior to men in regards to discipline. Mitchell grudgingly admits, “Women offer the services one single advantage over men: they are better behaved. They lose less time for disciplinary reasons and are less prone to alcohol and drug abuse.”<sup>9</sup>

As far as attracting high-caliber male recruits during the 1970s, Solaro also challenges Mitchell’s assertion that an all-male force would have been more attractive to young American men. Solaro suggests that “as the Vietnam War wound down and the draft sputtered out, good soldiers, men who might have made the military their lives, left in droves and in disgust. Disgust over the war, disgust over what the war had done to the Army.”<sup>10</sup> If the services could not retain their best when they were all male, how would the AVF attract top-quality recruits? Following Mitchell’s line of argument, the armed forces would most likely have remained depleted and broken organizations. The “Hollow Force” of the 1970s faced diminishing retention and recruiting numbers; the inclusion of women into the pool of re-

cruits actually provided the armed services with the opportunity to “choose the best qualified individual for a given position.”<sup>11</sup>

The AVF continues to face recruiting challenges today. As recruiters search for top-caliber officer recruits, the college scene has also dramatically evolved since the creation of the AVF. Student demographics have seen a shift from the male dominance of three decades ago to a student body where women significantly outnumber their male peers.<sup>12</sup> As a result, a trend has developed that supports early opponents’ suppositions of the caliber of female recruits. Women volunteering for military service are “on average better educated than men,” which promotes “an increase in educational levels” for the military as an organization.<sup>13</sup> In the current technocentric US military, education levels and mental abilities certainly matter.

Likewise, in the midst of an unpopular war in Iraq, recruiting and retention has once again surfaced as a problem facing the AVF. A recent article in the *New York Times* suggests that the calls for the Marines to close their recruiting station in Berkeley and attempts to ban military recruiters on college campuses has further hindered military recruiters’ abilities to attract qualified recruits.<sup>14</sup> The response of the Marine Corps echoes the response of most of the services in the mid-1970s: when faced with recruiting challenges, seek out female recruits. Moreover, women have proven themselves worthy of the attention.

Making up an increasing percentage of the total force, women have repeatedly demonstrated their capabilities in combat operations from the first Gulf War to OIF.<sup>15</sup> In 1993, the GAO released a report that had examined the performance of integrated units. The report revealed that nearly half of the men and women surveyed expected women to perform as well or better than men; 67.2 percent actually assessed that female performance met or exceeded the male performance.<sup>16</sup>

Recent examples that support this conclusion include the actions of Sgt Leigh Ann Hester, Silver Star recipient, who demonstrated that women also possess killer instincts, aggressiveness, and loyalty to their brothers and sisters in arms. For Hester, it was not about being a woman in a man’s world. It was about serving her country, defending her unit comrades, and being a good soldier.<sup>17</sup> Hester represents the growing trend in US operations around the world. Capt Lory Manning, USN,

retired, explains, “We now have units under fire with men and women in them. We have experience of women firing weapons. They don’t fall to emotional bits.”<sup>18</sup>

A-10 Warthog pilot, Capt Kim “Killer Chick” Campbell, also demonstrated the abilities of women in combat aviation. During the initial push into Baghdad in April 2003, Campbell provided close air support to US ground forces pinned down by Iraqi forces along the Tigris River. She described her thoughts about that particular mission to a crowd at the Smithsonian Museum: “These guys on the ground needed our help. That’s our job—to bring fire down on the enemy when our Army and Marine brothers request our assistance.”<sup>19</sup> Campbell’s aircraft received extensive damage from ground fire during the mission, but she successfully flew her aircraft back to Kuwait and even had to perform a very difficult, physically challenging, and rare maneuver to land the aircraft safely. During the final approach, Campbell’s “aircraft was flying extremely well,” but as she crossed “the landing threshold, the aircraft started a quick roll to the left,” and she “quickly counteracted that with flight controls, and the A-10 touched down.”<sup>20</sup> Campbell’s actions demonstrated that women could fly one of the most physically demanding aircraft under fire and still successfully accomplish the mission.

Even though the nature of combat has evolved since the introduction of the AVF, women have traditionally been at risk for harm during any conflict. Solaro emphasizes that the military’s initial attempts to protect women from the dangers associated with combat duty actually endangered them further. By concentrating women into noncombat support roles, the services, in particular the Army, understood the precarious position they placed women into especially in regards to the Soviet threat to Western Europe. Solaro highlighted the argument made by defense correspondent Arthur T. Hadley, Jr., that during the Cold War “More female soldiers, sailors, and airmen will die in the first five minutes of any next war we are forced to fight than were killed in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam combined. In fact, since females are clustered in the high-priority targets, initially women will die out of proportion to their numbers in the armed services.”<sup>21</sup> Hadley’s argument suggests the military services placed female service members in potentially danger-

ous combat situations without providing them the recognition or opportunity that official combat assignments warrant.

Hadley further expounds upon the military's acceptance of this reality when asked if the military understood this phenomenon. Hadley describes, "Over and over I hear from both high-ranking officers and civilian defense officials some such phrases as, 'Yes, we realize women will die in the next war.' Yet at the same time, I find everyone hiding behind the rubric that women are not in combat jobs."<sup>22</sup> Even though the military held fast to combat-exclusion policies during the first 20 years of the AVF, the reality remained that women, in and out of uniform, faced similar dangers as men serving in combat positions. The difference rested in the fact that armed forces trained men in official combat assignments to fight and provided them a means to defend themselves while women (and even other men) in non-combat roles received minimal combat training.

While women in noncombat roles certainly faced dangers during the threat of a Soviet invasion into Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, the current conflicts confronting the United States present no clear delineation between front and rear lines. Sociologist and gender studies expert Rosemarie Skaine suggests, "The old front line no longer exists because present day conflicts are peacekeeping tasks and that modern weaponry is more technologically operated than in the past."<sup>23</sup> Current DOD, Army, and Marine Corps policies continue to restrict women from direct ground combat roles, yet support positions such as military police, supply, and intelligence have placed women into Iraq and Afghanistan's "fluid lines of conflict, . . . challenging traditional ideas about what constitutes a 'combat' position."<sup>24</sup>

The notion that the combat-exclusion policies protect women from the dangers of combat directly conflicts with the realities of insurgencies or irregular wars presently ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. The disparity remains most evident in the Army's use of women. Solaro describes how, "In our current war, for example, female soldiers drive fuel tankers all over Iraq. However, they cannot crew tanks. A fuel tanker is not a glamorous target, but it is a lucrative one, particularly if it is resupplying tanks or Bradley fighting vehicles."<sup>25</sup> Although the Air Force continues to be the leader among the services for integration,

specific fields remain closed to women in the special operations. Women who can fly close air support missions to assist special operations forces on the ground risk being shot down and captured by the enemy; however, they are still prohibited from serving in those ground units.

Solaro suggests the military's acceptance of women into support roles that are often involved in combat, but denial of direct ground combat positions stems from the military's initial experiences with gender integration in the 1970s and 1980s. Solaro explains the Army in particular had to play "an intricate bureaucratic game," in order "to maintain this charade [combat exclusion] while continuing to assign women where they were needed."<sup>26</sup> The Navy also attempted to circumvent combat exclusion policies when the operational mission demanded it. According to Skaine, "Women have served legally in temporary combat positions; on May 12, 1993, the Navy had 158 women on temporary duty on 20 [combatant ships]."<sup>27</sup> The entirety of these experiences, from limited recruiting options to the caliber of female recruits to the operational demands of a Cold War stance, created an organizational schema that depended on the service and efficiency of women in uniform, regardless of combat risks. Even the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, which for the most part recommended continued exclusion, also ceded the point that "because military readiness should be the driving concern regarding assignment policies, there were circumstances in which women might be assigned to combat roles."<sup>28</sup>

Following the Gulf War, an examination of the combat-exclusion policies resulted in a defining of direct ground combat by the Army and Marine Corps to clarify where women could and could not serve. Both services based their new directives on the rule and definition of direct ground combat provided by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Aspin's new rule and definition stipulated,

- A. Rule. Service members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground as defined below:
- B. Definition. Direct ground combat is engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with

the hostile force's personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battle field while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.<sup>29</sup>

After delineating what defined direct ground combat, Aspin further clarified how the services went about closing positions to women to ensure opportunities for women availed themselves. Specifically, the services could justify exclusion if units remained collocated to direct ground combat units, the provision for separate living arrangements was prohibited because of operational requirements, the units were engaged in special forces missions, or if job-related physical requirements excluded the majority of women.<sup>30</sup>

The introduction of brigade combat teams (BCT) during the transformation of the military from a force-on-force establishment to a leaner, modular organization made enforcement of these restrictions nearly impossible. The concept of a BCT depends on creating a fighting force based on the correct module mix for the combat situation. Solaro witnessed the ramifications of this new method of waging war during visits to Iraq and Afghanistan. She describes, "Certain noncombat units, such as a medical company collocated with an infantry brigade, or combat correspondents with an infantry battalion, or MPs [Military Police] with the infantry at a forward operating base, were off-limits to women. But without women in these units, they increasingly couldn't function: I saw women serving in all of the above situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the barriers against women serving in smaller infantry units have eroded still further since then."<sup>31</sup>

Over the three decades since women integrated into the armed forces, organizational decisions, cultural shifts and evolutions, and the performance of women have contributed to an organizational schema, a thought process that pervades the current US military. The schema follows a convoluted pattern: policies exclude women from combat, yet women have performed well in combat; since operational needs sometimes dictate the use of women in these traditional combat roles, the armed forces will merely *temporarily* attach them to these restricted roles.

Solaro explains how this organizational schema, instituted in the early years of the AVF and present today, demonstrates

“the lineal ancestor of the present pretense that women in Iraq and Afghanistan are not *assigned* to combat units, only *attached*” (emphasis in original).<sup>32</sup> The armed services have always accepted that women may become involved in combat yet have willingly chosen to deny women the opportunities to serve in official direct ground combat positions. The reality remains, however, that women are performing duties in direct ground combat. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz clearly recognized the truth about the environment the integrated US military operates in: “As we consider the issue of womanpower in the service today it’s not just a matter of women being entitled to serve this country. It is a simple fact that we could not operate our military services without women. And as skill levels essential to our missions continue to increase, it will be even more essential that we draw from all our citizens, that we draw from the largest pool of talent available.”<sup>33</sup>

Wolfowitz identifies two fundamental truths about the issue of women in combat that critics choose to deny or ignore. First, the likelihood that the most-qualified person for a specific mission will be a woman is only increasing as women more often choose higher education in comparison to men. Second, the nature of the conflicts the United States presently faces demands women fulfill roles once deemed inappropriate due to their direct ground-combat nature. These roles include patrolling the towns and cities in Iraq and Afghanistan where insurgents often use their own women to hide their weapons, plans, and even identities, but cultural standards prohibit men from interrogating or searching these women. As chapter 4 reveals, these women are also increasingly joining the efforts of insurgent and terrorist groups and therefore must be considered potential targets.

Critics of women in combat may suggest that concern for an enemy’s culture only provides further evidence of the feminization of the military; however, recent experiences reveal how catastrophic a heavy-handed military response can be in counterinsurgent operations. Further, potential enemies are also turning to women for the tactical advantage they provide. The rise and popularity of *shahidas* signifies that even conservative Islamic cultures appreciate the contributions of female combatants willing to die for their tribe, nation, culture, or religion.



Returning to a pre-AVF armed force structure does not provide a solution since an all-male military would still face the challenges of a counterinsurgency where half of the population and an increasing number of combatants are female.

A return to an all-male military or barring women from serving in combat or combat-support roles would also indicate a critical shift in American cultural identity. Americans pride themselves on living in a democracy where every citizen is equal under the law. Despite attempts by critics like the CMR to argue that combat exclusion does not discriminate against women but in fact protects them from violence, the fact remains that the US government continues to discriminate against half its population.

### **Civic Equality—Does America Stand for Equality for All?**

For young Americans, turning 18 years old marks a certain rite of passage. It acknowledges adult status, including the right to vote, marry, and make legal decisions in their own right. For young men, it also means registering for Selective Service. Although the draft ended in 1973, American men between the ages of 18 and 25 are required to register for any future drafts unless they fall into specific waived categories. American women, however, are not required nor permitted to register for Selective Service. Often one of the more emotional arguments used by the critics of women in combat, the question of the draft remains a hotly contested subject even without the issue of women entering into the debate. For those who advocate for women in combat, however, the issue of Selective Service remains at the heart of their argument. Among those seeking full equality, liberal feminists remain the strongest and most vocal in advocating an extension “of all civil rights and responsibilities to women, including their equal exposure with men to the political will of the state.”<sup>34</sup>

Their argument draws down to a question of civic equality. Dismissed by critics as a feminist ploy to emasculate the military, the argument remains valid since “In the all-voluntary force, the draft is not an issue at this point but registering for the draft still is. Currently, only males are required to register for

the draft.”<sup>35</sup> The implications are clear: America expects its men to be prepared to defend their nation when called; American women need not apply since their services are not wanted.

The 1992 Presidential Commission overwhelmingly supported the continued denial of this civic responsibility. The commission found that “important government interests exist which are substantially related to excluding women from draft registration, e.g., the military effectiveness of our land combat forces.”<sup>36</sup> In that one sentence, the commission reinforced the assumption that women remain detrimental to the combat effectiveness of the armed forces. The commission held that since the draft entails establishing a ground combat force and women remain restricted from ground combat, women should not be subject to draft registration. The commission’s recommendation, however, went beyond just stating the legal precedence behind its decision. It specifically demanded that Congress “should prohibit women from serving in direct ground land combat positions,” to preclude the requirement for female conscription.<sup>37</sup> The members of the commission against the inclusion of women in any combat roles, including aviation and naval combat positions, suggested that women should remain excluded from combat to justify continued exclusion from draft requirements. Dissenters to the commission’s recommendations specifically correlated combat with conscription. They concluded, “Because womens’ [sic] exemption from the draft is inextricably tied by legal precedent to their exemption from combat duty, the only way to avoid the risk of losing that exemption from the draft is to embrace a *consistent* policy against assigning women to any combat military occupation specialty” (emphasis in the original).<sup>38</sup>

In the grand scheme of things, what did the commission conclude? Essentially, the commission held that civic responsibilities amongst the genders ought to remain unequal. Aspin’s policy also unfortunately concurred with the notion that the physical disparity between women and men permitted continued discrimination against women. This policy, which has remained in effect for the most part, creates the perception that “by both policy and law—both discrimination *and* prejudice are okay” (emphasis in original).<sup>39</sup> In other words, the US government has legitimized the concept that women are not subject to the

same civic responsibilities as men and thus the government can treat half the population differently based on gender.

Nevertheless, women do engage in or support direct ground combat actions in their roles as drivers, military police, and medics. Female soldiers such as Sergeant Hester and SPC Monica Brown remain merely attached instead of assigned to these combat units even though they have engaged in direct ground combat. The recommendation of the 1992 Presidential Commission has perpetuated a legal fiction.

The commission's dependence on the cultural influences of their recommendation also provides insight into recent attempts by Representatives Duncan Hunter and John McHugh to rein in the current influx of women into nontraditional combat roles. Citing a number of religious, sociological, and ethics based testimonies, the opponents to the commission's recommendations concluded, "Permitting women in combat is egalitarianism of a different order than providing opportunities for them to become doctors, lawyers, and members of the U.S. Senate. Assigning women to combat would require reordering our cultural values and dismissing the experience of human and military history."<sup>40</sup> The case studies presented in this paper provide evidence that women in the modern era have contributed to combat operations in a variety of roles and will most likely continue to contribute *even when patriarchal societies deem their participation inappropriate*.

The case studies presented in this paper reveal that women do possess the aggressiveness and killer instinct critics accuse the "softer sex" of lacking in their nurturing nature. Feminist international relations theorist Prof. Ann Tickner suggests cases such as these debunk the myth of associating "women with peace," since this assumption "has been invalidated through considerable evidence of women's bellicosity and support for wars in many societies."<sup>41</sup> Victims of Nazi brutality like Duras and Sevier turned their hatred against the Germans to help defeat them. Palestinian women encourage their sons to seek martyrdom in their fight with the Israelis. American women like "Shock" May and "Killer Chick" Campbell revel in taking the fight to the enemy.

The realities of the AVF and current military operations remain that women *are* serving in combat, whether in official

capacity or not. Legally denying women the right to register for selective service continues to differentiate them from their male peers despite any demonstrated capability in several ways. The association between combat participation and the draft reinforces the current exclusion policies. The cultures and bureaucracies of the US military adamantly and rightly define and maintain their roles in fighting the nation's wars. However, Solaro argues, the legal exclusion of women from combat only serves to isolate them from that culture and bureaucracy since: "The military—the Army and the Marines especially—exist to fight. To be excluded from that core function is to be second-class. To be second-class because, and only because, one is a woman is to invite disrespect, no matter how well one performs one's job. . . . Even worse, to be second-class is to lead the good soldiers to believe, rightly or wrongly, that in a fight *they can't depend on you*" (emphasis in original).<sup>42</sup>

Just as the female Soviet pilots struggled to earn the respect of their male counterparts since they often lacked support from their senior leadership, Solaro suggests American female service members must continuously prove themselves worthy of the trust of their male counterparts since policies still discriminate against them. The Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies appears to accept this aspect of Solaro's argument. Its 2005 report suggests that the disparities between male and female combat assignments and differing physical standards have led some to "not value women as highly as men."<sup>43</sup> The task force explains that this institutional devaluation of female service members has actually increased "the likelihood of harassing and even abusive behaviors."<sup>44</sup>

Combat exclusion also inhibits promotion in the armed services, specifically the Army and Marine Corps, to senior ranks since "Those who risk their lives and take the lives of others control and determine the future of the institution in ways that no civilian could ever control a business; those who do not, however necessary their skills, remain second-class."<sup>45</sup> The system is currently set up such that a woman will never become the Army's chief of staff; promotion depends on combat service and *assignment*.

While the military certainly leads other civilian institutions concerning equal opportunities such as pay and benefits, men continue to possess an advantage over women when seeking higher positions within the military establishment. The fact remains that “men who served in a noncombatant unit are allowed, if qualified, to enter the combatant units. Women in noncombatant units may get the same pay, but not the same opportunity.”<sup>46</sup> Without officially opening up combat positions, roughly 15 percent of the Army remains ineligible to compete for the top leadership positions, where the numbers of women “are small today in part because of their lack of combat experience.”<sup>47</sup> As the Army and other services turn to women to fulfill recruiting demands, the percentage of soldiers denied promotion opportunities will likely increase.

A number of proponents of women in combat equate the situation with the decision to end racial segregation in the services following World War II. Brig Gen Thomas Draude, USMC, retired, a member of the 1992 Presidential Commission, supported lifting the combat exclusion citing the integration of racial minorities into the armed services. Draude recounted in an interview with Solaro the response of the other commission members in using that comparison. The commission challenged witnesses who suggested the issue of female combat integration was analogous to the issue of racial integration in the 1950s.

Draude vehemently disagreed with commission members who dismissed the comparison. He explained, “I saw a lot of parallels. We were excluding the majority of the population, not because of lack of desire, or patriotism, or expertise, or character, but because of the way they were born. And it drove some people crazy. And I said, tell me what’s different? Explain to me why it is right to exclude people because of the way they were born—when its gender, but not race. And no one, to my satisfaction, could do so.”<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Draude’s daughter, at the time, was training to become a Navy pilot. When asked if he would want to see her at risk of becoming a prisoner of war, Draude responded, “My answer is yes, because I believe we should send in the best.”<sup>49</sup>

The critics of Draude’s line of reasoning simply dismissed the analogy as irrelevant, stating that the analogy failed because “Dual standards are not needed to compensate for the physical

differences between racial groups, but they are needed where men and women are concerned. A proud history as successful warriors exists among men of different races, but not among women.”<sup>50</sup> Solaro remains dubious of such opinions “that gender was a bigger obstacle to overcome than race, and that little if any meaningful parallel could be drawn between blacks and women because, black or white, men are men and women are not.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Solution—Selection Based on Capabilities, Not Gender**

Despite the best attempts of those more culturally conservative members of Congress, the 1992 Presidential Commission, academics, and the US military, the realities of current combat operations include active female participation and growing support from the American public. As early as 1990, the American public began to accept the role of women in combat operations. An NBC News and *Wall Street Journal* poll asking whether it was acceptable or unacceptable for women to be sent on potential combat missions found: “Seventy-three percent said it was acceptable, and 23 percent said it was unacceptable. Seventy-one percent of the men and 74 percent of the women said it was acceptable.”<sup>52</sup>

As the generation that watched the first Gulf War on CNN enters into leadership positions throughout government, military, and civilian sectors, acceptance of gender equality has also increased. Skaine conducted an opinion poll of 889 college students in six universities in the United States in the mid-1990s. Skaine’s surveys revealed, “More college students agreed than disagreed that if men are drafted, women should be also.”<sup>53</sup> A 2004 poll of active duty members by the *Military Times* revealed another interesting organizational reality. Members of the armed forces do not want to return to a draft at all. Seventy-five percent of those polled opposed drafting men while 83 percent opposed drafting women and 73 percent believed reinstating the draft would lead to a decline in the quality of service members.<sup>54</sup>

As the American society’s perception on women serving in combat appears to be evolving, the evidence that a cultural

shift is occurring also exists. In the two current wars, women have died in the line of duty and in combat operations with no outcry from the American public. Contrary to the opinion that the spectacle of women being brought home in body bags would trigger enormous public outcry, there is “little evidence that the [American] public is somehow less willing to tolerate their suffering than that of men.”<sup>55</sup> The only public outcries have been primarily from antiwar critics who use the death of any service member to draw attention to their political position.

Prophecies about declines in the military’s combat effectiveness if the armed forces allowed women into combat positions have also not materialized. The fact remains that influences other than women’s involvement, such as technological advances in communications, have created greater changes in the military.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, the dependence on the AVF has also forced the military to adapt to the realities of women making up an increasing percentage of the force. Since “the country’s ability to maintain an all-volunteer army has been considered to depend on the effective use of the female labor force,” military leaders who deride a return to the conscripted force have had to find a way to exploit the capabilities of women.<sup>57</sup>

Not all attempts have been successful, as Solaro suggests, since “women clearly had every soldier’s right to be trained. In their case, the problem was not education, but physical capability. A remedial physical education program could have been designed to dramatically increase women’s capability, but the military chose to ignore the possibility; like supposed low intelligence of black soldiers, physical weakness in female soldiers was culturally imposed rather than innate.”<sup>58</sup> However, just as the racial integration of black soldiers took time to overcome organizational biases and obstacles, the integration of women into combat roles is slowly moving forward. Senior Army leaders acknowledge the contributions of female soldiers in the counterinsurgency fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many Army leaders, including former Army chief of staff Gen Gordon Sullivan, challenged the Hunter/McHugh Amendment simply because such a reversal would hamstring Army operations around the world by closing 21,925 slots to female soldiers.<sup>59</sup>

The loss of those positions would certainly affect the combat effectiveness of Army units and send a strong message to po-

tential female recruits. The ramifications of the amendment forced former defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, to intervene to avoid catastrophes in both AORs.<sup>60</sup> Rumsfeld's position, along with those of key military leaders, actually highlighted an important aspect often overlooked by those seeking to limit the role of women in the military and, by default, combat. As long as the United States continues to depend on the AVF concept and as long as "military resources [are] stretched thin, it is extremely important that the armed forces be able to recruit quality men and women into the services. The military will not be able to recruit quality women in large numbers if obstacles preventing their full and fair integration into the military are not addressed and resolved."<sup>61</sup>

Military culture is evolving, albeit slowly, as evidenced in the stance made against the Hunter/McHugh Amendment. Certainly, at some point or another, there has existed a great "deal of 'gender consciousnesses' in military organizations. For a woman in the military, what matters first is her gender; for a man in the military, what matters first is his occupational identity."<sup>62</sup> The testimonies of current women in uniform reveal that this gender consciousness has evolved. The Chick Fighter Pilot Association, for example, embraces the fact that its members are women. At the same time, however, it revels in and glorifies the fact that its members are fighter pilots first and that fact trumps all other associations. Likewise, Sergeant Hester regards herself as just another soldier. The experiences of the women presented in this paper represent a continuing evolution in societal opinions of the role of women in those societies.

For the American military, much of the focus has shifted to the capabilities brought to the fight. In the case of female soldiers on patrol in Iraq, their gender has provided the military with the capability to engage and interact with half of the Iraqi population without violating cultural taboos and restrictions. This provides the US military with greater human intelligence, threat assessment, and access to those often responsible for rearing the next generation of Iraqi citizens. Current policies, if followed to the letter, would deny the military these opportunities.

Critics suggest that the words of GEN Norman Schwarzkopf condemn women to minor support roles in the military when he declared, "Decisions on what roles women should play in



war must be based on military standards, not women's rights."<sup>63</sup> Schwarzkopf's assessment actually supports the idea that *capability*, not *gender* should enable or preclude an American from serving in combat. Furthermore, policies "that continue to deny women equal opportunity based on capabilities will continue to propagate the notion that women are the weaker sex and therefore incapable to perform at expected levels" which will actually hinder combat effectiveness and mission accomplishment.<sup>64</sup>

Once capabilities drive selections for assignment rather than gender, all other issues associated with integrating women would fall under typical leadership challenges. Should members of an integrated unit, for example, engage in inappropriate relationships, unit leadership must address these situations and mete out appropriate punishment for violations under the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*. However, if the government and the armed services perpetuate myths of female inferiority and unreliability through their policies, women will never achieve full equality in the military or in this society.

For her part, Col Martha McSally also emphasizes the capabilities all military members bring to the fight. In an article discussing her career and time as a fighter squadron commander in Afghanistan, McSally emphasizes her desire to be "a role model to both men and women because we are a fighting force and should not be concerned with differences between us."<sup>65</sup> The issue about women serving in combat is not so much about women's rights but about the rights of all American citizens to defend this nation.

### Notes

1. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 165.
2. According to the Selective Service Web site, some are not immediately required to register including the disabled, the incarcerated, or those already serving on active duty. Selective Service System. [SSS.gov](http://SSS.gov).
3. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 201.
4. Fenner and deYoung, *Women in Combat*, 40.
5. Gutmann, *Kinder, Gentler Military*, 144.
6. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 72.
7. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 8.
8. Gutmann, *Kinder, Gentler Military*.
9. Mitchell, *Weak Link*, 7.
10. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 158.

11. Skaine, *Women at War*, 156.
12. Sklaroff, "A Woman's World," 63.
13. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 84.
14. Quenqua, "Sending in the Marines."
15. Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," 54.
16. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 186.
17. Wood, "Female Soldier Receives Silver Star in Iraq."
18. Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," 56.
19. Burnham, "A-10 Pilot Wows Smithsonian Crowd."
20. Ibid.
21. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 161.
22. Ibid., 161-62.
23. Skaine, *Women at War*, 25.
24. Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," 56.
25. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 164.
26. Ibid., 162.
27. Skaine, *Women at War*, 25.
28. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 179.
29. Skaine, *Women at War*, 28.
30. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 187.
31. Ibid., 188.
32. Ibid., 162.
33. Corbett, *Downgrading of DACOWITS*, 1.
34. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 67.
35. Skaine, *Women at War*, 127.
36. Presidential Commission, *Report to the President*, 40.
37. Ibid., 41.
38. Ibid., 79.
39. Devilbiss, *Women and Military Service*.
40. Presidential Commission, *Report to the President*, 61.
41. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 71.
42. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 161.
43. DOD, "Report of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment," 9.
44. Ibid.
45. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 160.
46. Skaine, *Women at War*, 25.
47. Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," 56.
48. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 185.
49. Gordon, "Panel Is Against Letting Women Fly in Combat."
50. Presidential Commission, *Report to the President*, 45.
51. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 154.
52. Skaine, *Women at War*, 121.
53. Ibid., 127-28.
54. "Military Times Poll," *Military Times*.
55. Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," 56.
56. Ibid., 57.
57. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 84.

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58. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 154.
59. *Ibid.*, 232.
60. Tyson, "Bid to Limit Women in Combat Withdrawn."
61. Corbett, *Downgrading of DACOWITS*, 9.
62. Devilbiss, *Women and Military Service*.
63. Presidential Commission, *Report to the President*, 46.
64. Devilbiss, *Women and Military Service*.
65. Bergquist, "First Female Pilot in Combat Reflects on Career."

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

*The real catch was to have a female medic out there because of the cultural sensitivities and the flexibility that gave commanders. It is absolutely not about gender in terms of how they [women] will do.*

—Maj Paul Narowski, 73rd Cavalry Regiment

*A society that wants weak women usually manages to produce them.*

—Erin Solaro

The GWOT has created a number of challenges the US armed forces must face. From the role of air and space power to the debate over the assignment of American women to combat positions, the military must seek to answer these perplexing complications. The GWOT revealed the regulations governing the role of women in combat to be “vague, ill defined, and based on an outmoded concept of wars with clear front lines that rarely exist in today’s counterinsurgencies.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the realities of the current conflicts, the debate over the role of women in combat will never cease so long as political leaders continue to relegate women to inferior roles in American society.

By acknowledging the vital role women play in armed conflicts, the political leadership of the United States can shape American culture to recognize that women can and do engage in violence for and against the state. If Americans can culturally accept this fact, those fighting the war on terror will be better prepared to face future female insurgents. Ultimately, female insurgents share similar motivations and strive for the same universal objectives as their resistance predecessors and military women: they fight in order to provide a safe future for their children.

Modern female terrorists’ motivations mirror those of anti-Nazi resistance fighters, yet Westerners are still surprised and even aghast when a woman chooses to blow herself up in a terrorist attack. Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdistan

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Worker's Party, explains that the modern female resistance fighters and suicide bombers are "fully aware of being free women with an important message to pass on and who could be examples to all women the world over."<sup>2</sup> With seeming ignorance to that message and in spite of evidence to the contrary, an Israeli Defense Forces captain acknowledges that women are still less suspicious when crossing the border from Palestinian territories.<sup>3</sup> Western strategists, both military and political, must come to appreciate this tactic if the West wants to win the war on terror.

Furthermore, the tactics employed by terrorist organizations and insurgencies, including the use of female combatants, has rendered combat exclusion policies pointless. A recent study about the Army's assignment of women to combat roles conducted by the RAND Corporation evaluated the current policy as "not actionable" since it was "crafted for a linear battlefield" that depended on "concepts such as 'forward and well forward' [that] were generally acknowledged to be almost meaningless" in current Iraqi operations.<sup>4</sup> If America's current enemies, undoubtedly more conservative about the role of women in their societies, acknowledge the efficacy of female combatants in their operations, political leaders must recognize what military leaders have accepted as fact. Women can contribute successfully to combat operations and remain ready to do so.

American female warriors face strong criticism from pundits who desire a return to an all-male combat force. Similar to their sisters who fought for the Soviet Union, American women serve a nation that propagates notions of equality yet continues to discriminate based on gender. American political leaders who sought to liberate Afghani women from the *burqua* based on an American virtue of civic equality continue to deny half of the American population the same rights afforded the other half. When President Bush "forcefully backed the Army's [combat exclusion] restrictions," and proclaimed a policy of "no women in combat," he reinforced the notion that American women are not the equals of American men.<sup>5</sup> Such proclamations further inhibit the abilities of women to integrate fully and reinforce perceptions that women are incapable of effectively serving in combat roles.

Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan directly contradict the arguments put forth by critics of women in combat. Women have proven they are formidable fighters who do have the capability to engage in direct ground combat. Combat units like Private Brown's have accepted women as equal members; Brown's unit considered her "one of the guys, mixing it up, clearing rooms, doing everything that anybody else was doing," and wanted to keep her as their medic.<sup>6</sup> Further, the American public has also revealed acceptance of female American combatants. In fact, as early as 1990 a majority of the American public felt the DOD should allow women to serve in combat zones. An NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll asked, "Do you feel it is acceptable or unacceptable for the United States to send women on military missions where they may be involved in combat?" Over 70 percent of respondents, male and female, answered it was acceptable to allow women to conduct these missions.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, protests against the war in Iraq, for example, do not center upon the use of women in combat roles but against the overall use of combat forces in Iraq.

Equally important, if the United States wants to continue to represent freedom, democracy, and equality for all citizens, American women should be required to register for conscription with the Selective Service. Once American society establishes a standardized expectation for *all* of its citizens, then it can truly represent a free and equal society. Likewise, to provide a capable fighting force, the armed forces need to transition away from gender-normed physical fitness tests since they do not indicate how individuals perform their jobs in combat. Establishing minimum fitness requirements based on the physical demands of the job would eliminate the presumption of a double standard or diminished combat effectiveness.

OIF and OEF have forced the United States to reevaluate a number of foreign and domestic policies, including preemptive war, the draft, and the organizational structures of the American armed forces. OIF and OEF have also highlighted the need for policy makers to reconsider combat exclusion rules that currently govern US combat operations. Women have always been subjected to the violence of war. It is now time for the United States to encourage and empower American women to serve in combat roles if they meet the physical

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requirements of those positions. Policy leaders should rescind current combat exclusion policies and welcome American women as civic equals.

### Notes

1. Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star."
2. Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, 155.
3. Ling, *National Geographic*.
4. Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star."
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Skaine, *Women at War*, 121.

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Future American Military Operations**

**Alfonso**

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